

LUFTWAFFE COLOURS
Volume Five Section 2

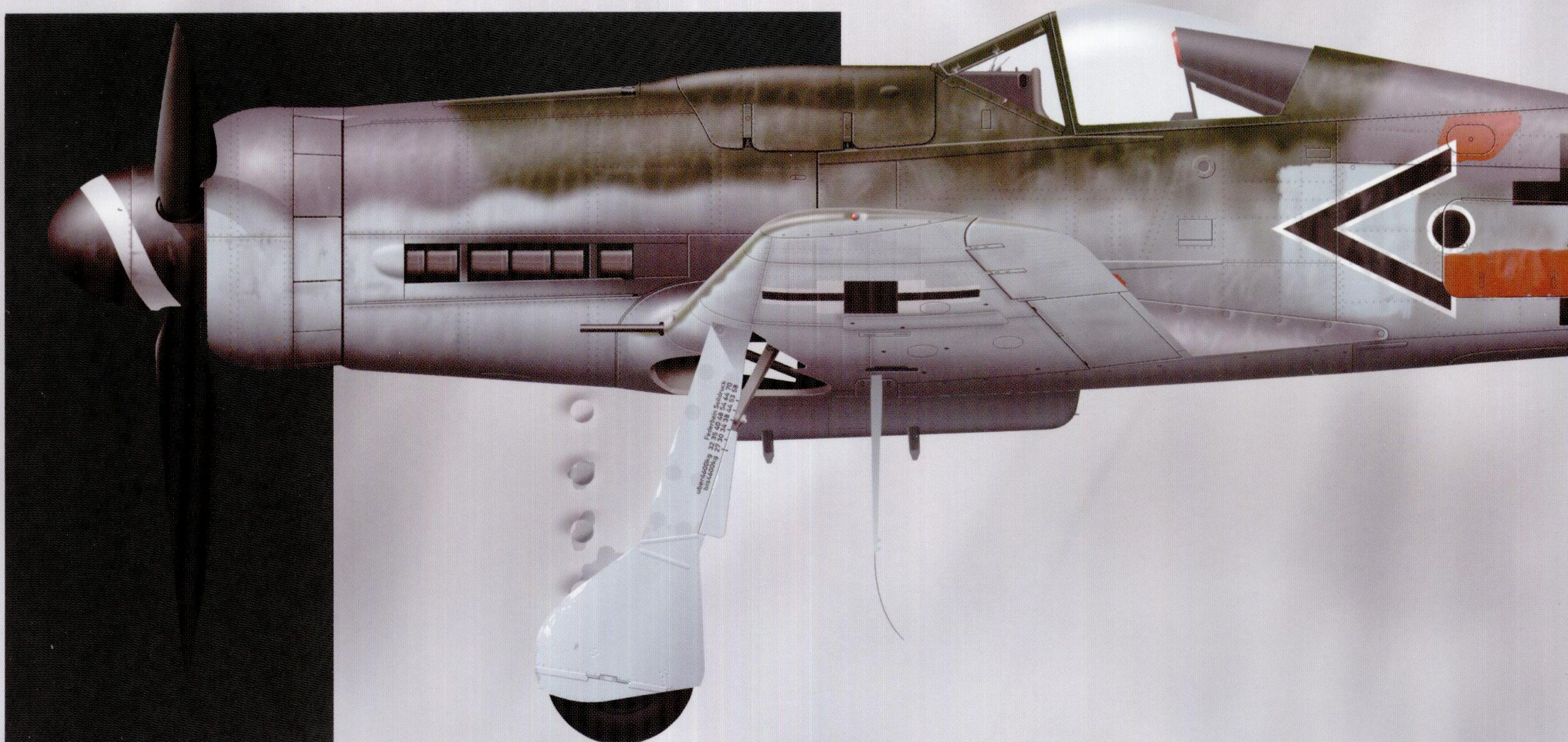


JAGDWAFFE

**Christer Bergström
& Martin Pegg**

**WAR IN
THE EAST**

1944-1945



WAR IN THE EAST

'The battle for the capital of the Reich is over. True to their oath to the flag, forces from all branches of the Wehrmacht and units of the Volkssturm have set an example of the best of German soldiery by their unprecedented heroic resistance to the last breath...'

Wehrmacht Communiqué, 4 May 1945



The Turn of the Tide

'By the failure of 'Zitadelle' we had suffered a decisive defeat. The armoured formations, reformed and re-equipped with so much effort, had lost heavily in both men and in equipment and would now be unemployable for a long time to come. It was problematical whether they could be rehabilitated in time to defend the Eastern Front... [...] Needless to say the Russians exploited their victory to the full. There were to be no more periods of quiet on the Eastern Front. From now on the enemy was in undisputed possession of the initiative.'

General Heinz Guderian

In late 1943, the situation on the Eastern Front had turned irreversibly. Hitler's last hope of achieving a major tactical victory and of gaining some badly needed momentum, Operation 'Zitadelle' at Kursk in July 1943, had failed and ended in a disastrous defeat. Consequently, the whole mighty *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front was pushed back to the Dnepr River by a Red Army that had grown even mightier. In the air, an initial superiority achieved by the *Luftwaffe's* fighters had been lost through a series of relentless air battles that wore down the *Luftwaffe*.

The ability of the Red Army to overcome the first dark months of the war with Germany and recover from the immense setbacks suffered during 1941 and 1942, remains one of the greatest feats of the Second World War and was achieved not only in numerical and technical fields, but also in fighting spirit and pilot quality. This was mainly due to the unbreakable will of its soldiers and airmen to continue fighting to the last, and in parallel situations, the morale of other armed forces subject to such a vast onslaught had simply collapsed.

However, the Soviets' continued opposition had also resulted in terrifying losses and created gaps which could only be filled by despatching large numbers of recruits to first-line service before their military training was completed. Thus, while the Red Army inevitably continued to sustain enormous losses into 1943, the *Luftwaffe's* fighter pilots on the Eastern Front had greater possibilities to survive than their



RIGHT: A Bf 109 G-6 of an unknown III. Gruppe. By 1944, the Bf 109 G-6 was the most numerous *Luftwaffe* fighter type in service in the East. Although the original design dated back to the 1930s, it was a type with which the older German pilots were very familiar and in aerial combat was still superior compared with most Soviet fighters.

colleagues opposing the RAF and USAAF in the West and a core of *Luftwaffe* fighter pilots in the East were able to develop an immense wealth of experience never previously seen in any air force at war.

One such example of a *Luftwaffe* pilot is Gerhard Barkhorn who, in late 1943, was a *Hauptmann* and *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 52. As a front-line fighter pilot since 1940, Barkhorn had flown his first combat missions during the Battle of Britain but scored no victories and, on one occasion, was shot down into the English Channel. In June 1941, Barkhorn and his unit were posted to East Prussia and took part in the opening attack against the USSR on 22 June. During the next ten days, II./JG 52 flew hundreds of combat missions, mainly encountering only unescorted Soviet SB and DB-3 medium bombers, and claimed 30 shot down without losing a single aircraft to hostile action. Under these circumstances, *Lt.* Barkhorn could increase his experience and, on his 120th combat mission, flown on 2 July 1941, he shot down a twin-engined DB-3 as his first aerial victory. When, two and a half years later, *Hptm.* Barkhorn shot down a Soviet Airacobra over the eastern Crimea at 12.15 hrs on 23 January 1944, it was his 238th victory, and when he landed his Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-6 shortly afterward, he had completed his 1,000th combat mission.

Although the Soviet Air Force, the VVS, had entered the war with an aircraft inventory that was of high world standards and, by late 1943, had overcome most of its previous qualitative shortcomings, it was still inferior to the *Luftwaffe* which maintained a technical superiority over the Soviets for most of the war. The two standard *Luftwaffe* fighter types then in service were the Fw 190 A-4, A-5 and A-6 versions and the Bf 109 G-6, but whereas the *Geschwader Stabsstaffel* and III./JG 51, and *Stab*, I. and II./JG 54 were the only Fw 190-equipped fighter units in the East, in this theatre it was the Bf 109 G-6 which was the most numerous *Luftwaffe* fighter type and which equipped all other *Jagdgruppen*. Still superior in aerial combat to most Soviet types, the Bf 109 was, moreover, an aircraft with which the German veterans were familiar, having operated earlier versions since the 1930s.

In early 1944, the aircraft inventory of the Soviet fighter arm was of varying quality. The old I-16s, I-153s and Hurricanes had disappeared from first-line service, as had the MiG-3, which was phased out of production in favour of the Il-2. Many Soviet units, however, still flew the Lend-Lease Bell P-39 Airacobra which, due to its poor power to weight ratio, could be out-climbed and out-turned by both the Bf 109 G-6 and the Fw 190 A. A number of obsolete Lend-Lease Curtiss P-40 Warhawks were also still in first-line service with the VVS, but this type was hopelessly inferior to the German fighter types of 1944 and *Luftwaffe* fighter pilots claimed to have shot down more than 200 of them throughout the year.

Far more dangerous adversaries for the *Luftwaffe* were the more recent Yak-1 and Yak-7B fighters which proved to be quite a match, but these were succeeded by the Yak-9, which saw extensive use through 1944. An even better Soviet fighter, which had appeared during the latter half of 1943, was the La-5FN. In this version, an La-5 with a more powerful engine, the Soviets had for the first time produced a fighter that was superior to the German types, and this was followed by the La-7 and the Yak-3, two even more advanced Soviet fighters, both of which were considerably superior to the Bf 109 G-6 and the Fw 190 A. So good were these types that in late 1944, *Obstlt.* Hermann Graf, JG 52's *Geschwaderkommodore*, was compelled to instruct his pilots to "*avoid combat below 5,000 meters altitude with Yakovlev fighters lacking a visible radiator under the nose*", i.e. the Yak-3, which was very fast and had an excellent rate of climb. In this, it was similar to the La-7, which could reach 5,000 metres in just four and a half minutes compared with the 6.8 minutes required by the Fw 190 A-4 to reach the same altitude. Only with the later development of the Fw 190 D-9 and Bf 109 K-4 were the Germans able to introduce fighters that could compete with these Soviet types.

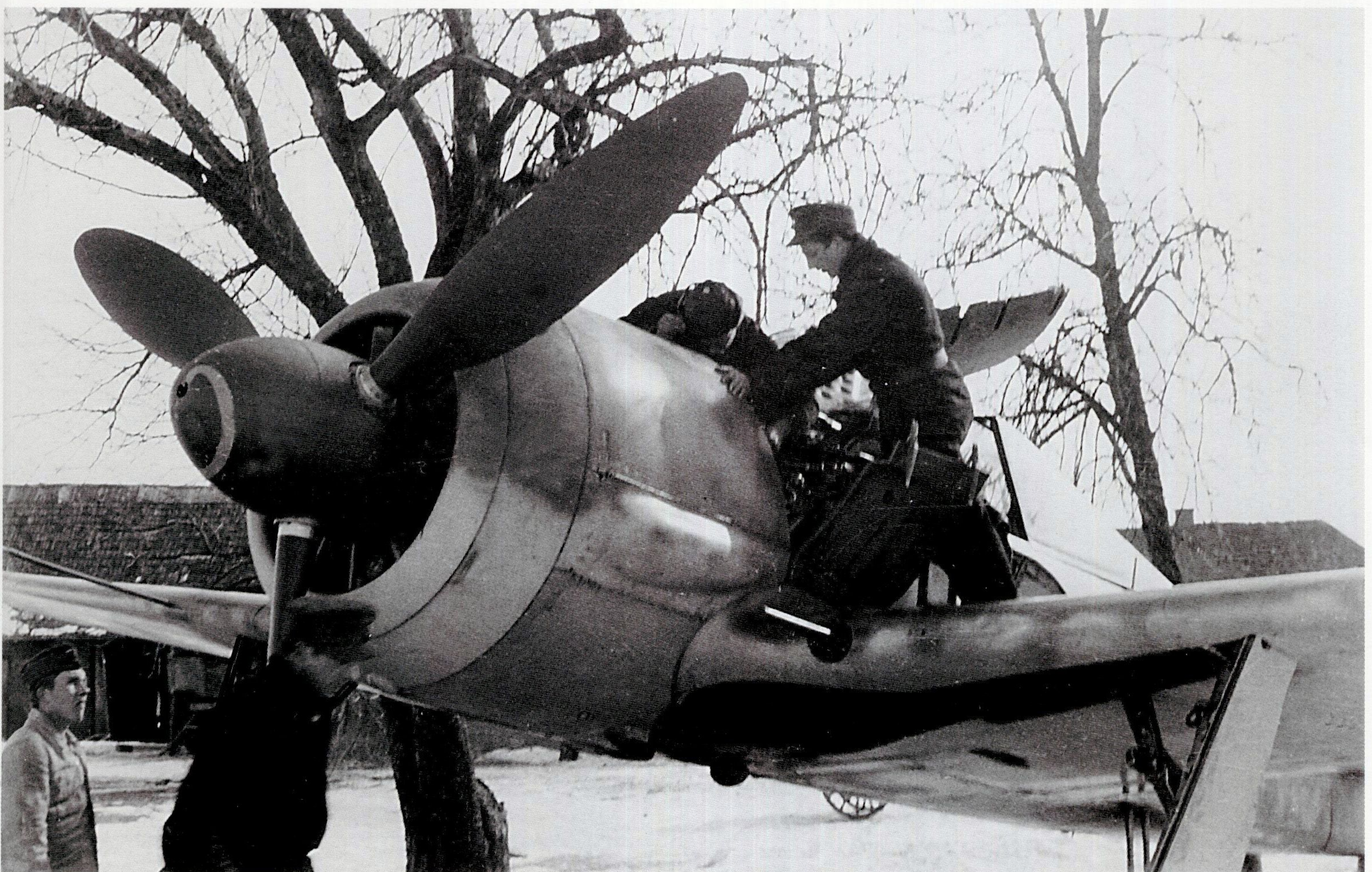
Another difference between the earlier fighter-versus-fighter combats on the Eastern Front and those in 1944 was that, by this time, radio transmitters and receivers had finally become a standard feature in all Soviet fighters. Thus, one of the most important advantages that the *Jagdwaaffe* pilots had enjoyed in the early years finally disappeared. The Soviets had also copied much of the German operational methods and doctrines, as did most other air forces. Ever since the Spanish Civil War, *Luftwaffe* fighter pilots had operated in close teams in which the *Rottenführer* was the sword and the wingman, or *Rottenflieger*, served as a shield. By 1943, this method was in common use by VVS fighter pilots who also started operating in offensive sweeps over enemy-controlled territory in the manner of the *Jagdwaaffe's freie Jagd*, or free hunt. This led to the development of a new core of successful VVS fighter aces, such as Vitaliy Popkov, Grigoriy Rechkalov, and Aleksandr Pokryshkin. Up to the end of 1943, Pokryshkin was credited with shooting down 48 German aircraft, by which time he had gained the experience accumulated in some 500 combat missions. However, while there were very few Soviet

pilots with the experience necessary to match that of the immensely skilled *Experten* in the *Jagdgeschwader*, the core of top Soviet aces that emerged during 1943 was far more experienced than the average Allied fighter pilot in the West who did not encounter the superior fighter opposition faced by the Soviet airmen.

During the German retreat in the last half of 1943 which followed the failure of 'Zitadelle', the role of the *Jagdwaffe* became hugely important. The increased Soviet fighter opposition in the autumn forced the *Luftwaffe*'s bombers and dive-bombers, which had paved the way for the advancing *Panzers* in the early *Blitzkrieg* years and, somewhat later, had slowed or even halted enemy offensives, had to adopt new tactics. While the bombers were compelled to carry out their attacks mainly at night, the *Stukageschwader* – the dive-bombers – were renamed *Schlachtgeschwader* and became ground-attack formations. At the same time, it was intended to phase out the Ju 87 and replace it with the Fw 190, but progress in this direction was slow due to the increased need for Fw 190s in the defence of the *Reich* and the demands made by the *General der Jagdflieger* were given greater priority. There was, therefore, no immediate wholesale conversion of the new *Schlachtgeschwader* to the Fw 190, which instead proceeded at the rate of approximately only one *Gruppe* every six weeks. When it later became possible to increase this rate of conversion, a shortage of the C-3 fuel required by the Fw 190 resulted in the Ju 87 being retained for even longer than originally planned as this used B-4 fuel, supplies of which were more plentiful. The Ju 87 was never entirely superseded by the Fw 190.

BELOW AND NEXT TWO PAGES: Unfortunately, nothing certain is known about these photographs although the II. Gruppe bar and the style of the yellow theatre markings would suggest that the unit to which the aircraft belonged was either II./JG 51 or II./JG 54. However, if, as thought, these pictures were taken some time in the winter of 1943/4, then II./JG 51 was at this time equipped with the Bf 109 G and can be eliminated, whereas II./JG 54 flew the Fw 190 from December 1942 until the end of the war. The aircraft shown are mostly Fw 190 A-4s which, together with the later A-5s and A-6s, one of which may be seen in the background (*BELOW*) continued to serve with II./JG 54 into the summer of 1944. Given the black tactical numbers, the aircraft almost certainly belonged to 5./JG 54 and, to judge from the condition of the trees, the probability of the photographs being taken in the winter of 1943/44 is confirmed. At that time, i.e. between October 1943 and January 1944, II./JG 54 was based at Vitebsk and Orsha, both being major air bases with full servicing facilities situated within 130 km of Smolensk in Central Russia. These photographs, however, would appear to have been taken at a satellite airfield.





January 1944-May 1945





LEFT AND BELOW: The I. Gruppe of JG 54 was also based at Vitebsk and Orsha in Central Russia in December 1943 and January 1944 and this crash-landed Fw 190 is thought to have belonged to that Gruppe. The camouflage pattern on the smock of the soldier standing on the left (*BELOW*) identifies him as a member of the elite Waffen-SS.



Nevertheless, with the VVS on the offensive and the *Luftwaffe* on the defensive, the role of the *Jagdarmee* assumed a greater importance in saving the retreating German armies from destruction from the air. Consequently, the fighting strength of German forces on the Eastern Front in late 1943 was still considerable and at the turn of the year, while the ground forces could field 2.5 million troops and 2,300 tanks, the numerical strength of the *Luftwaffe* in the East in early 1944 was around 3,000 aircraft, approximately the same number as in 1941. At the same time, however, the quality of both men and machines was far above the 1941 standard. So far as the *Luftwaffe* was concerned, it can be said to have been weakened, although only in relative terms by the improved quality of the VVS. Both the Red Army and the VVS had achieved greater improvement and in early 1943, the Soviet Army could muster 6.4 million troops with 5,800 tanks and 8,500 aircraft. While numerically, this was less than in 1941, qualitatively it was a far superior force to that which had existed in 1941, as its ability to hold the initiative against such a formidable force as the *Heer* and the *Luftwaffe* demonstrates.



ABOVE:
A Bf 109 G-6 of the Gruppenstab of I./JG 52 in the winter of 1943/44 about to start its engine. While one member of the ground crew stands on the starboard mainwheel tyre, another is on the wing and both have hold of the handle for winding the inertia starter.

Winter Battle in the South

In late 1943, the German Army was pushed back onto the defensive all along the Eastern Front and its strategy was one of delaying defeat and avoiding high losses. The *Luftwaffe* in the East was operationally divided between four air fleets, *Luftflotten* 1, 4, 5 and 6.

In the far north was *Luftflotte* 5 based in northern Norway and Finnish Lapland, with *Luftflotte* 1 deployed to support *Heeresgruppe Nord* in the Leningrad–Lake Ilmen area. These two *Luftflotten* also allocated parts of their forces to support Germany's Finnish ally. The only *Jagdgruppe* available to *Luftflotte* 5 for operations against the VVS in late 1943 was the Bf 109-equipped III./JG 5, this *Jagdgeschwader's* II. *Gruppe* being posted to *Luftflotte* 1, where it helped bolster the Stab, I., II. and IV. *Gruppen* of JG 54.

In the centre, holding Soviet Byelorussia, stood *Heeresgruppe Mitte*. Since its defeat at the gates of Moscow in late 1941, this army group had been quite successful in repulsing a number of Soviet offensives and had inflicted great losses on the attackers. *Heeresgruppe Mitte* was supported from the air by *Luftflotte* 6, formerly *Luftwaffenkommando Ost*, commanded by the able *Generaloberst* Robert Ritter von Greim. The dominant *Jagdgeschwader* in *Luftflotte* 6 was JG 51 – with Stab, I., III. and IV. *Gruppen* – which also allocated parts of its strength to support *Luftflotte* 4 to the south.

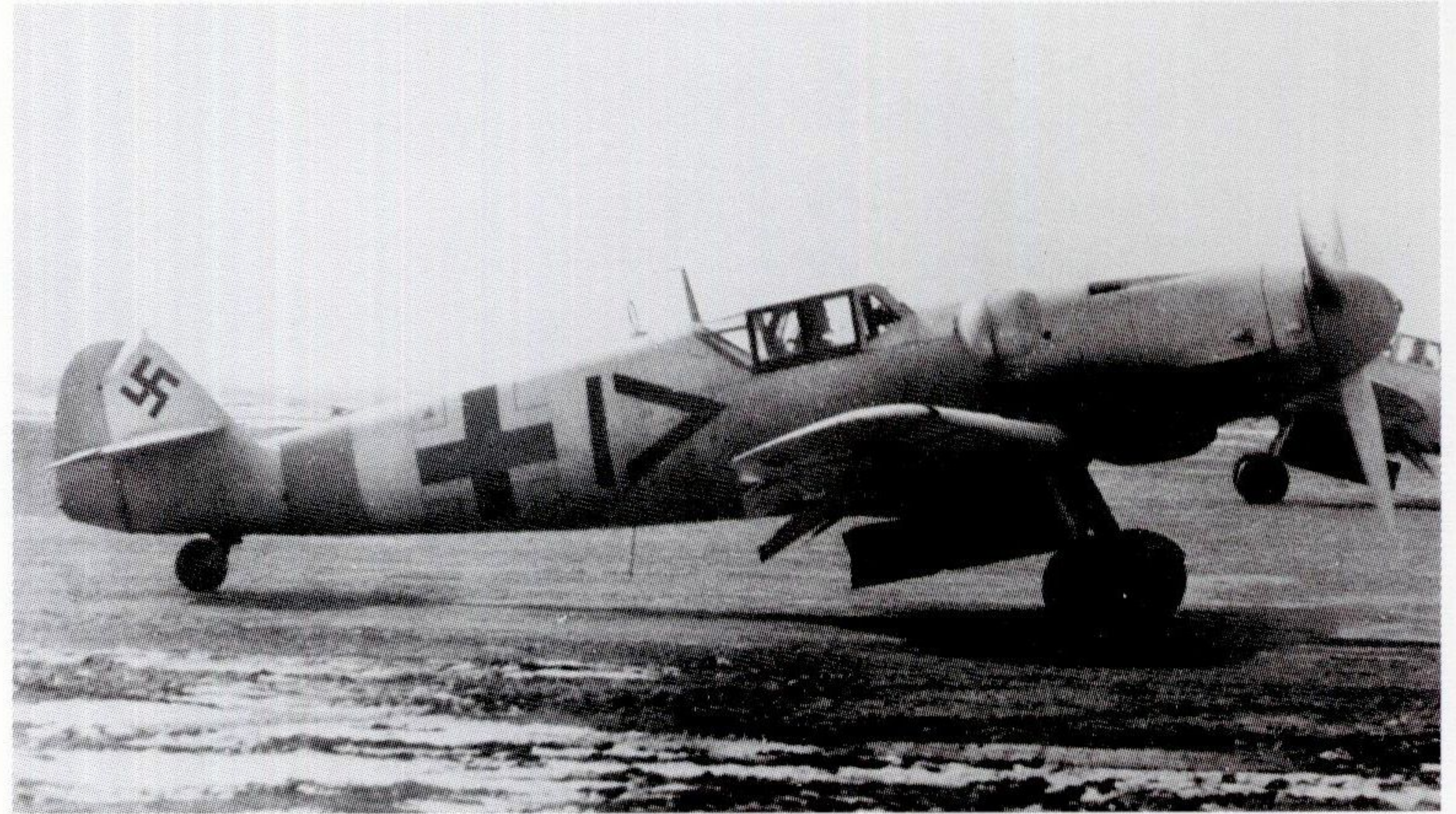
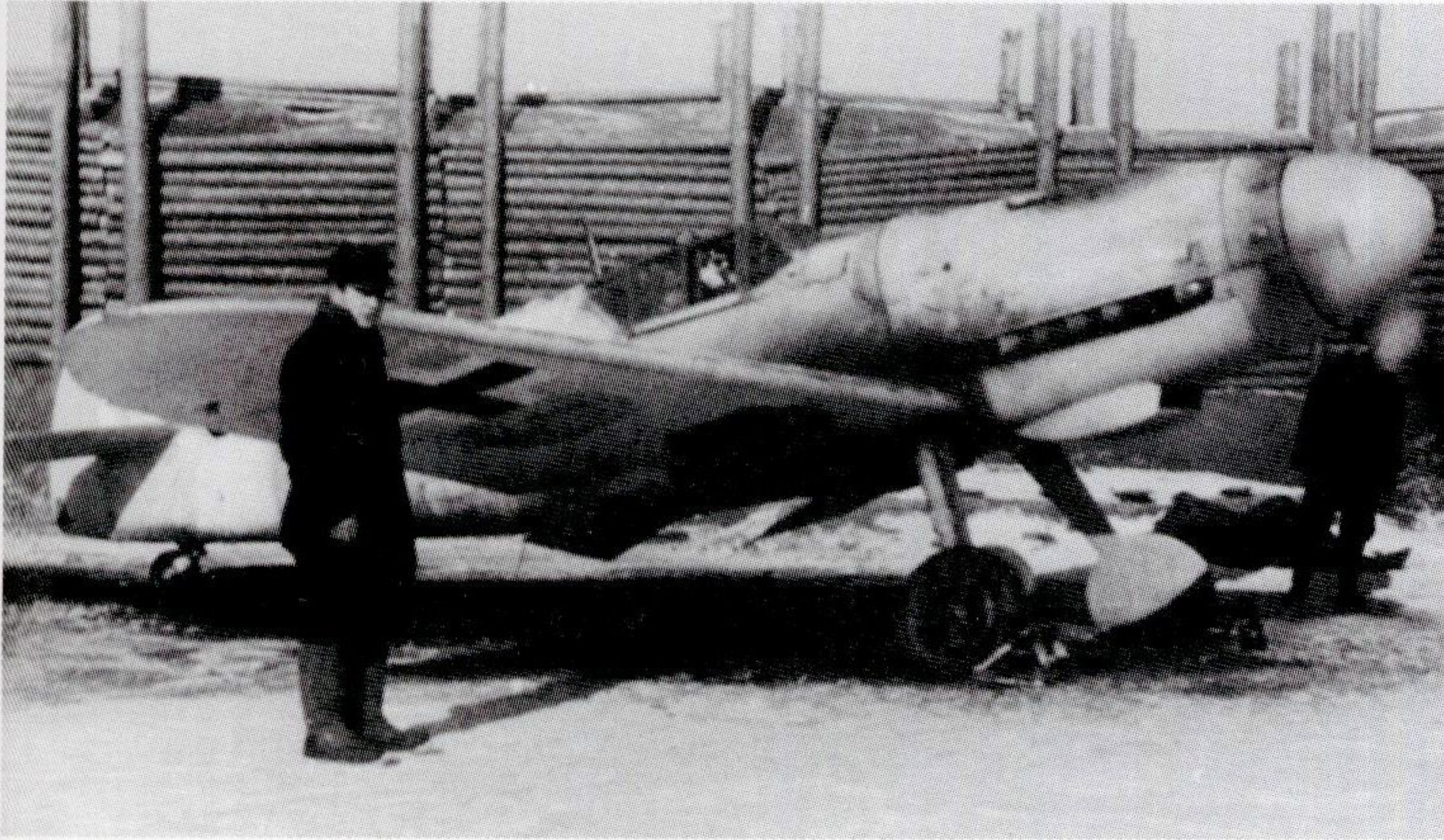
Ever since the Battle of Stalingrad, the southern combat zone had been the most critical for the Germans on the Eastern Front. Thus, the air fleet operating in this area, *Luftflotte* 4, was the strongest German air fleet, comprising 1,460 aircraft divided between I. *Fliegerkorps* in the Crimean Peninsula, and VIII. *Fliegerkorps* in the Ukraine. They were opposed by 2,360 Soviet aircraft divided between the air armies 2 VA, 5 VA, 17 VA, and 8 VA.

In the far south, the Germans had been forced to abandon their last foothold in the Caucasus – the so-called 'Kuban Bridgehead' – and withdraw across the Straits of Kerch to the Crimea. The Red Army had pursued the retreating force and established a small bridgehead on the Kerch Peninsula in eastern Crimea. This tiny geographical area held the whole of I. *Fliegerkorps* but had just a single *Jagdgruppe*, *Hptm.* Barkhorn's II./JG 52.

In the Ukraine, German forces had failed in their attempt to hold the advancing Red Army at bay on the mighty Dnepr River. The so-called *Ostwall*, or Eastern Wall, crumbled when a renewed Soviet offensive in November 1943 ousted the Germans from Kiev. Only by concentrating all available *Luftwaffe* units in this region were the Germans able to bring the Soviet advance to a halt, but this also had the effect of grinding down the operational strength of VIII. *Fliegerkorps*.

ABOVE: Another Bf 109 G-6 of JG 52 showing the single chevron normally applied to the aircraft flown by the Gruppe Adjutant but which was sometimes used to identify aircraft of a Stabsstaffel.

January 1944-May 1945

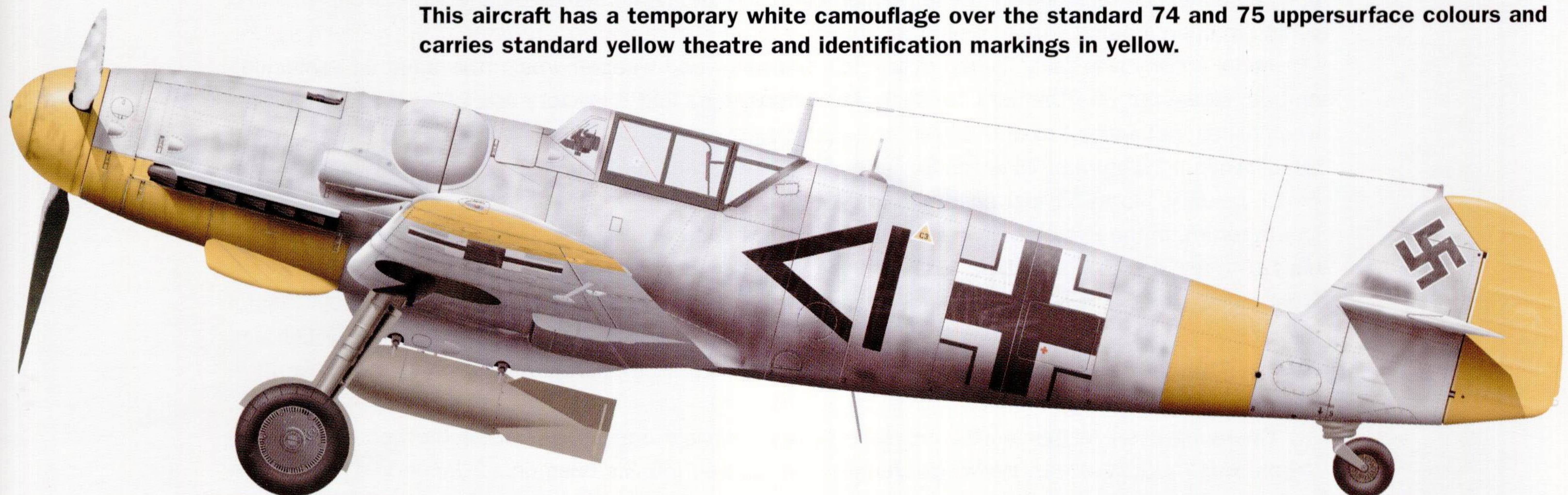


THIS PAGE: On 24 December 1943, when the Soviet 1st Ukrainian Front broke through the German lines, IV./JG 51 was obliged to abandon its base at Zhitomir and withdrew to Uman where the Kommandeur, Major Hans-Ekkehard Bob, wisely ordered his Gruppe's fighters (*ABOVE LEFT*) to be fitted with bomb racks for the Jabo role. Although fighter-bomber missions were disliked by many German fighter pilots, Bob's decision was unquestionably correct under the circumstances since halting, or at least hindering, the Soviet advance was of more importance than shooting down enemy aircraft. Under Major Bob's supervision, IV./JG 51 dropped 250-kg containers, each filled with 4 kg or 10 kg anti-personnel bombs, and with these weapons they inflicted heavy losses on any Soviet troop columns caught in open ground. The photographs (*ABOVE RIGHT AND BELOW*) show aircraft of IV./JG 51 preparing to take off, although in this case they are carrying SC 250 high explosive bombs rather than anti-personnel weapons. Note the Kommandeur's aircraft marked with a double chevron in the background (*BELOW*) and that the front faces of the propeller blades, visible (*ABOVE RIGHT*), have also been painted white.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-6 'Chevron 1' of Stab IV./JG 51, Uman, early 1944

This aircraft has a temporary white camouflage over the standard 74 and 75 uppersurface colours and carries standard yellow theatre and identification markings in yellow.





ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT: Although the profile on the previous page shows an aircraft with the front faces of the propeller blades painted white, there is some evidence to suggest that they may also have been painted yellow, as in the photograph (ABOVE LEFT) of another Bf 109 G-6 believed to be from III./JG 51. However, on the machine shown (ABOVE RIGHT), also from JG 51, the front of the propeller blades are indeed clearly white and the spinner yellow. Note that the tactical number on this aircraft is probably brown, a colour sometimes used instead of red or yellow.

RIGHT: An Il-2 attacking an airfield. This ground-attack aircraft gained a well-justified reputation for being difficult to shoot down, but the introduction of a pair of 20 mm cannon in underwing gondolas on the Bf 109 made this aircraft more effective against Il-2s. The Fw 190, with its powerful armament, already had the necessary firepower to combat the Il-2 from the outset.



On 24 December 1943, the Soviet Winter Offensive began with the 1st Ukrainian Front breaking through the German lines and headed towards Zhitomir, west of Kiev. The weakened VIII. *Fliegerkorps* was unable to repeat its defensive success of the previous month, and the Soviet troops tore the German front lines apart. IV./JG 51 had hurriedly abandoned its base at Zhitomir as Soviet tanks approached and *Major* Hans-Ekkehard Bob, the *Gruppenkommandeur*, ordered his pilots to fly fighter-bomber missions. This task was disliked by many German fighter pilots indoctrinated with the 'von Richthofen mentality', according to which shooting down enemy aircraft was all that mattered, but Bob was a

veteran who had pioneered such missions during the Battle of Britain and, given the situation, it was undoubtedly sounder strategy to employ the *Gruppe* as *Jabos* rather than shoot down enemy aircraft. Under *Major* Bob's supervision, IV./JG 51 dropped 250 kg containers, each filled with 4 kg or 10 kg anti-personnel bombs, and with these weapons they inflicted heavy losses on any Soviet troop columns caught in open ground.

Aerial activity was fairly limited during this period by bad weather which hampered air operations on both sides, but on 5 January 1944, JG 51 nevertheless lost 55-victory ace *Uffz.* Gabriel Tautscher when his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire. Three days later IV./JG 51 was badly stricken in a surprise attack when Il-2 *Shturmoviks* of the Soviet 525 ShAP attacked the *Gruppe's* new base at Vinnitsa, and on 11 January, IV./JG 51 lost another two pilots, one of whom was *Major* Bob's adjutant.

In return, in the Byelorussia combat zone farther north, *Stab*/JG 51's *Ofw.* Anton Hafner achieved his 119th and 120th victories on 12 January. Hafner had achieved fame with II./JG 51 on the Eastern Front during 1941 and 1942 when he scored 62 victories in 16 months, although his most successful period had been in Tunisia during November and December 1942 when he shot down 20 British and American aircraft in a few weeks. He joined the *Stabsstaffel* after returning to the Eastern Front in November 1943.

Operating even farther north, on *Heeresgruppe Mitte's* northern flank, in the contested Nevel region, was I./JG 51. Here, *Hptm.* Joachim Brendel scored four victories on 12 January, a similar feat

being repeated by IV./JG 51's *Lt.* Otto Gaiser in the Ukraine three days later.

Farther south in the Ukraine, where the skies were patrolled by I./JG 52 and III./JG 52, *Fhj.Fw.* Hans-Joachim Birkner shot down five Airacobras on 15 January. Birkner served with 9./JG 52, the *Karayastaffel*, in which had earned fame under Hermann Graf's command in 1942. In early 1944 this *Staffel* was commanded by *Lt.* Erich Hartmann, whose score stood well above 150. On 17 January Hartmann claimed to have shot down four Soviet aircraft while I./JG 52's *Ofw.* Franz Woidich brought down five, so attaining his 66th personal victory.

III./JG 52 was commanded by *Major* Günther Rall, whose 250 victories placed him in second position after the war's top-scoring fighter ace, *Hptm.* Walter Nowotny of I./JG 54. Meanwhile, over the Crimea, *Fhj.Fw.* Otto Fönnekold of II./JG 52 scored his 100th victory on 19 January while the *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Gerhard Barkhorn, strove to surpass Rall and Nowotny.

As the VVS increased its activity in the air over the Ukraine, the German fighters were shifted back to focus on free hunting missions. This was the field where the *Jagdwaaffe* had developed its best skills, but not even the combats against the Il-2 ground-attack aircraft were as easy as they had once been. By this time, large numbers of the new Il-2s with rear gunners were in action and although the death rate among gunners was appalling, they also took a severe toll upon intercepting German fighters. On 22 January, IV./JG 51's *Lt.* Otto Gaiser, credited with 66 victories, was posted as missing after entering combat with four Il-2s.

Air Bridge to Cherkassy

On 24 January 1944, the 2nd Ukrainian Front opened a new battlefield when it launched a surprise attack against the Germans at Korsun on the Dnepr, east of the 1st Ukrainian Front's area of operations. By 28 January, the 2nd Ukrainian Front had surrounded the German XI. and XLII. *Armee*korps, with altogether 56,000 men, at Cherkassy, west of the Dnepr. VIII. *Fliegerkorps* immediately organised three *Transportgruppen* and began an operation to airlift supplies into the Cherkassy pocket. Being hastily improvised and faced with the prospect of penetrating an effective Soviet fighter shield, this operation had many similarities to the Stalingrad operation one year previously and a total of 44 transport planes were lost in the first five days alone. Between 29 January and 3 February, Soviet 2 VA and 5 VA conducted more than 2,900 combat sorties and claimed to have shot down 130 German aircraft.

Farther south, the Soviets attacked in the Dnepr Bend and seized Nikopol on 30 January. On 5 February, the 1st Ukrainian Front reached as far as Rovno and Luck, having advanced 200 miles, and then turned southwards, crossing the Bug river at Vinnitsa. In this situation, *Generalfeldmarschall* Erich von Manstein, commanding German Army Group South, once again proved his ability to improvise effective counter-measures and on 8 February he despatched four *Panzer* divisions in a counter-attack aimed at relieving Cherkassy. The VIII. *Fliegerkorps* received considerable reinforcements and, owing to its air support, von Manstein's counter-attack made good progress.

At the same time a new air base with concrete runways was constructed for the airlift operation to Cherkassy and IV./JG 51 was tasked with providing escort for the Ju 52 transport aircraft in a renewed attempt to supply the surrounded forces which began on 9 February. Meanwhile, the Soviets organised counter-measures, with 5 VA being assigned to support the ground troops while 2 VA, supported by 10 IAK/PVO, mounted the air blockade. Thus while Soviet bombers systematically attacked the surrounded German troops sheltering in the towns around Cherkassy, fighters hunted the German transport aircraft. *Hptm.* Adolf Borchers' 11./JG 51 was assigned the task of providing the Ju 52s with close escort but was instructed to fly slowly next to the vulnerable three-engined Ju 52s. Thus the Bf 109 G-6s were severely disadvantaged and suffered great losses by the Soviet fighter pilots' aggressive attacks. The Soviet fighters in this area maintained air superiority and included one unit operating red-nosed La-5s on freelance missions, without doubt 3 GIAP, which earned the German airmen's particular respect. When the missions over Cherkassy commenced in January 1944, Borchers had between 12 and 14 pilots, but five weeks later, only Borchers, *Lt.* Peter Kalden, *Uffz.* Heinz Marquardt, and *Uffz.* Martin Ulbrich remained.

Between 9 and 14 February, the Ju 52s were able to fly a mere 100 to 185 tons per day into the pocket during what proved to be a very costly operation mounted at a time when transport aircraft were in very short supply due to the increased scale of effort required elsewhere. Finally, during the night of 17-18 February, the surrounded troops at Cherkassy broke through the Soviet lines and were re-united with the main German front, but although some 36,000 German soldiers reached safety, a further 18,000 became prisoners of war.

***Freie Jagd* Over Snow and Mud**

During the first two months of 1944, the opposing armies in the Ukraine fought against nature as well as each other, for with temperatures hovering about freezing point, the ground could be covered by thick snow one night yet might thaw again the next day. These thaws frequently transformed roads and makeshift airfields into quagmires. When they were able to take to the air, the pilots on both sides now flew over a varied landscape, for where the ground lay in shadow there were areas white with snow while those exposed to the sun were muddy brown. With IV./JG 51's fighter-bomber missions in January and close escort to Ju 52s in February the main exceptions, the German fighters were otherwise assigned predominantly *freie Jagd* missions.

While VIII. *Fliegerkorps* fought desperately to contain the Soviet offensive in the Ukraine and save its surrounded troops at Cherkassy, the main battles on the two flanks were fought in the air where, in January 1944, *Hptm.* Barkhorn's II./JG 52 in the Crimea claimed to have shot down 72 Soviet aircraft against 19 aircraft lost. Moreover, in the 12 weeks up to 13 February, II./JG 52 had attained 350 victories of which 60 were claimed by the *Gruppenkommandeur* himself. Thus Barkhorn became the third fighter pilot to achieve 250 victories, and when he was recalled to Germany for home leave and to be awarded the Swords to his Oak Leaves on 2 March 1944, his score stood at 251, one less than Rall's and five less than the top scorer, Nowotny. Nevertheless, this feat had brought Barkhorn to the brink of almost total exhaustion.

In the central combat zone, *Lt.* Otto Würfel of III./JG 51 collided with his wingman during an aerial combat on 23 February, two days after he had shot down six Soviet aircraft. Although Würfel baled out, he was taken into Soviet confinement and was not among the PoWs who returned post-war. On the same day, Würfel's wingman, *Ofw.* Heinrich Dittlmann, with a score of 57 victories, was posted missing, and *Stab*/JG 51's *Ofw.* Anton Hafner shot down no fewer than seven aircraft, bringing his tally to 131 victories. Hafner was awarded the Oak Leaves on 11 April 1944.

These German aces achieved the bulk of their victories on *freie Jagd* missions during which they were free to choose whether or not to enter combat. Hardly surprisingly, they often picked the easiest targets and preferred to attack Il-2 *Shturmoviks*, bombers, or the slow-flying fighters that were tied to them as close escort, rather than being drawn into combat with large numbers of Soviet fighters or fighters operating freely. Some would even avoid engaging Il-2s with rear gunners, even though intercepting these feared ground-attack aircraft was what German ground troops most demanded. The German fighter's tactics were greatly facilitated by the doctrine of the VVS, for while free-hunting missions still received the highest priority in the *Jagdwaaffe* on the Eastern Front, VVS fighter units were called upon to operate more as an integral part of the Army's ground actions. Had the VVS adopted a more aggressive stance in air-to-air action, the *Jagdwaaffe*'s losses would have been even higher and its success rate lower. However, German ground forces still formed a very powerful adversary and by focusing on tactical air support for its own troops, the VVS undoubtedly played a key role in the Soviet Army's success.

As for the *Wehrmacht* which had stunned the world through its effectiveness in the *Blitzkrieg*, it displayed its greatest skill during the defensive actions and bitterly contested withdrawals on the Eastern Front. Time after time, German troops, often supported by heavy tanks, managed to regain a local initiative and inflict large losses on advancing Soviet spearheads. Such pockets of resistance could often only be destroyed by Soviet air attacks, and the seizure of Apostolovo and Nikopol by the Soviet Army was due in great measure to the effective support received from the VVS.

Meanwhile, the *Jagdwaaffe Experten* continued to pick off one Soviet aircraft after another during their free hunting missions. On 26 February 1944, *Lt.* Erich Hartmann of 9./JG 52 engaged Soviet fighter formations in three separate missions and claimed ten Airacobras shot down, these including his 200th victory at 14.40 hrs, his 201st at 14.45, and his 202nd at 14.50 hrs. Thus "Bubi" Hartmann became the *Karayastaffel*'s second *Staffelkapitän* to reach the magical 200-mark after Hermann Graf, who in September 1942 became the first ever to reach that number. Erich Hartmann had received his tutoring as a hunter in the air from Graf's old wingman, Alfred Grislawski, who had continued to hammer in one important piece of advice: "*Get in closer before you open fire.*" Hartmann had so refined this that he often closed to within 100 feet of his target and destroyed it with only a one-second burst from his Bf 109's cannon. Erich Hartmann's importance is shown by the fact that of the 76 Soviet aircraft that were claimed by III./JG 52 between 8 January and 28 February 1944, 40 were shot down by him alone. For this, and previous feats, he was awarded the Oak Leaves on 2 March 1944.

Nevertheless, even Hartmann's impressive gunnery could have little impact on the general war

situation as his attacks were largely against Soviet fighter formations while groups of Il-2s and Pe-2 bombers wrought havoc among the German defensive positions on the ground. A Soviet summary of the winter offensive reads:

‘During January and February 1944, Soviet troops, with air force help, annihilated major German troop concentrations and liberated the Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, and Zaporozhye districts, and drove the German invaders from the Zhitomir and almost all of the Rovensky and Kirovograd districts, as well as some regions in the Vinnitsa, Nikolayev, Kamenets-Podolsk, and Volynsk districts. The enemy was thrown back along much of the length of the Dnepr. Favourable conditions were created for a further offensive along the entire Soviet-German front. In spite of bad weather and the spring thaw, Soviet fliers constantly supported the Soviet ground troops. During a two-month period, the units of the 2nd, 5th, 17th, and 8th Air Armies flew 31,836 sorties.’

Containing the Attacks

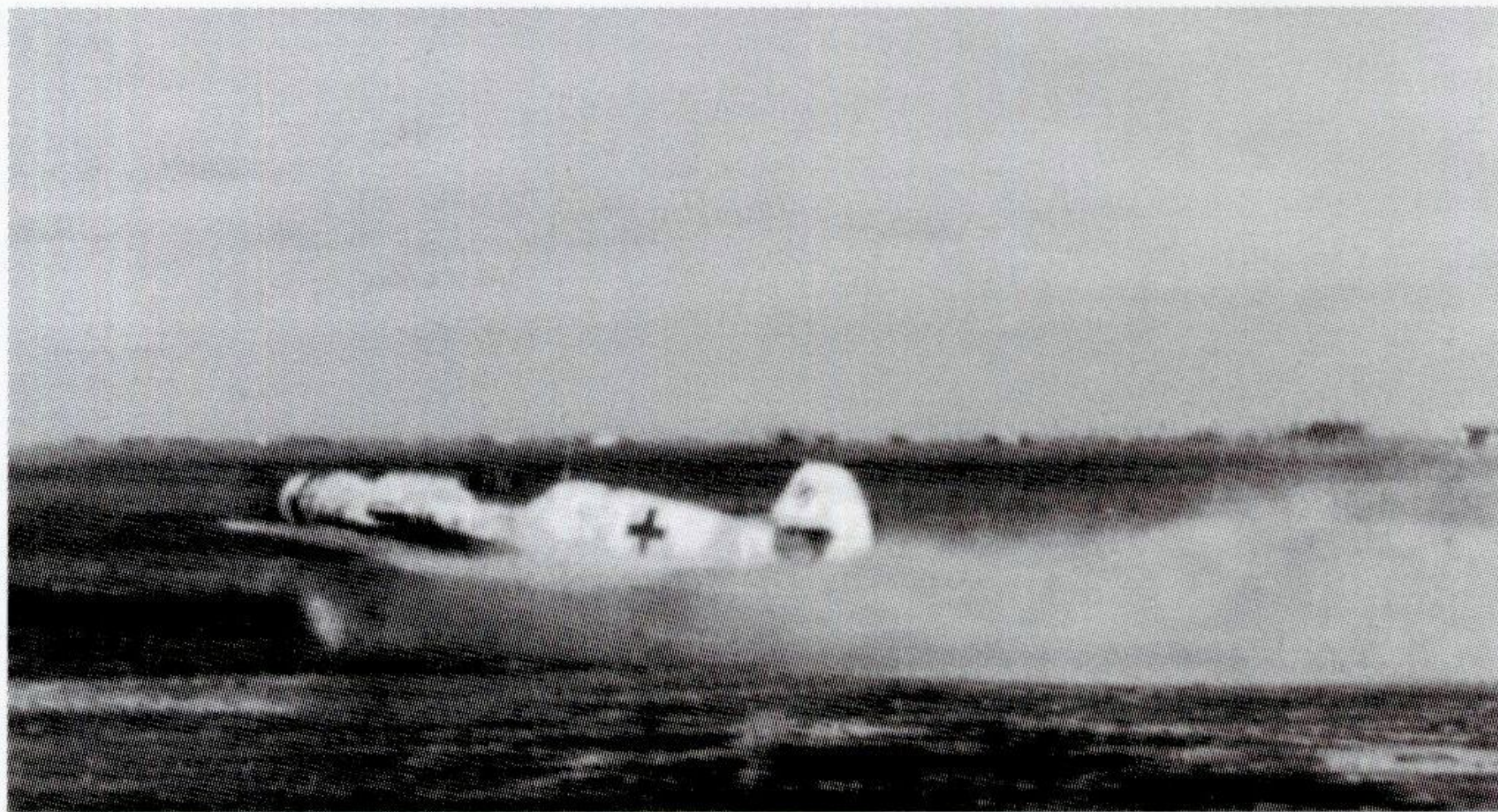
Erich Hartmann had just left the Eastern Front for the *Wolfsschanze*, Hitler’s Headquarters in East Prussia, where the *Führer* was personally to present him with the Oak Leaves, when the Red Army launched its next offensive in the Ukraine. On 4 March, the 1st Soviet Ukrainian Front opened a new attack toward the south-west from Shepetovka and Dubno. Farther south, the 2nd Ukrainian Front broke through the German front on 5 March and the next day, the 3rd Ukrainian Front started attacking along the Black Sea coast. The air fighting during these new offensives gave ample proof of the VVS’s steadily mounting effectiveness, even against the best *Jagdwaaffe Experten*.

During the first days of these new offensives, air operations were affected by bad weather and the few air missions that which be conducted on 7 March cost I./JG 52 the loss of six Bf 109s without any success. The fact that 7./JG 52’s *ObIt.* Walter Krupinski reported the destruction of a LaGG-3 as his 175th victory on 9 March was a poor consolation. Similarly, I. and III./JG 52’s combined result for 9 March was a meagre two victories against three losses. By then, III./JG 52 had already been forced to abandon the well-equipped Uman aerodrome which was seized on 10 March by Soviet armoured forces helped by close-support from rocket-firing Il-2s. With the loss of Uman, III./JG 52 transferred to Vinnitsa-East where it was subjected to a series of devastating Il-2 attacks which forced the Germans to abandon this airfield after only four days. III./JG 52 then transferred to Proskurov aerodrome, which soon became blockaded by Soviet fighter patrols.

It was while attempting to break this blockade on 13 March that one of the 9. *Karayastaffel*’s best pilots, *Lt.* Hans Dammers, was lost. Dammers was one of III./JG 52’s veterans. He had scored his first victory in August 1941 and, together with other pilots like Alfred Grislawski, Leopold Steinbatz and Edmund Rossmann, Dammers had belonged to the backbone of NCOs who had made III./JG 52 the most successful *Jagdgruppe* of the war. Dammers’ flying career ended when, after shooting down an La-5 as his 113th victory, his Bf 109 G-6 was hit by debris from his victim. Although Dammers baled out, his parachute caught on the tail fin of his aircraft and while he survived the resultant crash, he was seriously wounded and died in Stanislawow military hospital four days later.

On 21 March 1944, III./JG 52 reached its 3,500th victory, 400 of which had been claimed since October 1943 in return for 42 of its own aircraft lost, but there was little time to celebrate as, on the same day, the 1st Ukrainian Front renewed its attack while the aircraft of 2 VA filled the skies overhead. Two large formations, each of between 60 and 100 Soviet Il-2s, Pe-2s and Boston bombers with fighter escort, pounded the German defence positions. Against this aerial onslaught, III./JG 52 could claim only six Soviet aircraft shot down against one lost, although during the next two months, this *Jagdgruppe* would attain another 100 victories, this time for 22 aircraft lost.

Farther south on 21 March, the 2nd Ukrainian Front crossed the Dnestr River causing the German 1. *Panzerarmee* to lose contact with 8th Army in the south, and on the 22nd, the 3rd Ukrainian Front reached the southern part of the Bug River. On 24 March the 1st Ukrainian Front in the north crossed the Dnestr and by the 27th had completed the encirclement of *Generaloberst* Hans Hube’s 1. *Panzerarmee*, trapping 300,000 men in the area around Kamenets-Podolsk. Firmly resolved to avoid



ABOVE: Still wearing its coat of winter whitewash, a Bf 109 G takes off during the spring thaw of 1944.

a second Stalingrad, *Generalfeldmarschall* von Manstein ordered *Generaloberst* Hube immediately to initiate a breakout operation westwards. Moreover, *Generalmajor* Fritz Morzik, who had organised the successful air supply operation to Demyansk two years earlier, was appointed *Transportfliegerführer* 2, or Air Transport Leader 2, and allocated a mixed force of 150 Ju 52 transport aircraft and 100 twin-engined He 111 bombers converted for the transport role. The task of providing fighter cover for the He 111 transport missions was assigned to III./JG 52, based at Lemberg, but the operation was made considerably easier by the spring thaws which softened the Soviet's improvised airstrips, disrupted their extended supply lines and virtually paralysed the VVS in this area during the most critical period. Between 29 March and 5 April, III./JG 52 flew relentlessly to the surrounded troops but encountered hardly any Soviet aircraft with the result that the *Gruppe* suffered four combat losses against just two victories, these being credited to *Major* Günther Rall and *Oblt.* Friedrich Obleser. The latter was officially awarded the Knight's Cross on 26 March and received it on 1 April.

During its retreat westwards, 1. *Panzerarmee* lived off the land, so only ammunition was flown in by the transport aircraft. The successful air supply, and the migration of the pocket, saved the whole German and Rumanian situation in the south, but the fact that 1. *Panzerarmee* had abandoned its positions so infuriated Hitler, who obstinately insisted that all ground was to be held, even when it was not to the Germans' advantage to do so, that on 30 March he dismissed both *Generalfeldmarschall* Manstein, Army Group South's commander, and *Generalfeldmarschall* Kleist, commander of Army Group A. In the subsequent reorganisation, *Generaloberst* Model was promoted to *Generalfeldmarschall* and placed in command of the old Army Group South, which on 5 April was re-named Army Group North Ukraine, while Army Group A was re-named Army Group South Ukraine and placed under the command of *General* Ferdinand Schörner.

The spring thaws continued to bog down the Soviet advance, not least because the VVS, operating largely from forward airfields, was grounded and the land forces were denied air support. At the same time, however, the *Luftwaffe* and the Rumanian Air Force, which were operating from permanent air bases, showed that they still held a convincing strike capacity and during March 1944, the aircraft of *Luftflotte* 4 flew almost 21,000 combat sorties.

On 4 April, an attack eastwards by two SS *Panzer* divisions began to break into the Soviet line separating the 1. *Panzerarmee* from the main German front and three days later succeeded in meeting up with the troops of 1. *Panzerarmee* fighting their way out. The focus of the battle in the southern combat zone now shifted further northwards to the north-western Ukraine, where a German 4,000-man garrison was surrounded at Tarnopol. As well as the support of SS *Panzer* units, this small force received tremendous aid from the five *Transportgruppen*, plus several *Kampfgruppen* and a *Schleppgruppe*, recently released from the task of supplying the 300,000-strong 1. *Panzerarmee*. The IV./JG 51 was tasked with providing the transport aircraft with fighter escort, but Soviet air opposition was negligible, as indicated by the figures for 11./JG 51's operations during this period. On 7 April *Lt.* Peter Kalden and *Uffz.* Helmut Heinze achieved one victory each, and two days later *Ofw.* Heinz Marquardt and *Fw.* Helmut Holtz both shot down one Soviet aircraft. On 11 April, the *Staffel*'s only victory was an La-5 credited to *Fw.* Holtz, and the situation was the same on the 13th when Holtz returned to base claiming one Yak-9. On 16 April, *Lt.* Kalden destroyed a Yak-9 while Holtz destroyed an old R-5 reconnaissance biplane. In return, 11./JG 51's *Ofw.* Friedrich Heimann, a pilot with 30 victories, was lost, and on the 18th, 11./JG 51 failed to score any victories but lost two pilots, one of whom was the aforementioned *Fw.* Helmut Holtz, whose final tally was 56 victories.

By 12 April, only the centre of Tarnopol remained in German hands and the city was finally cleared of all resistance on the 17th. This was the last major Soviet success in the Ukraine in the spring of 1944 as the *Rasputitsa* – the infamous spring thaw – turned the Ukrainian soil into a quagmire and was a major factor in preventing the German army groups in the south from being annihilated.

BELOW: Between 24 December 1943 and 17 April 1944, the battle of the Dnepr resulted in the loss of 676 Soviet aircraft such as this Il-2. Note the rear gun position which was installed to provide rearward defence.



A Spell is Broken

Under *Obstlt.* Hannes Trautloft's able command, JG 54, operating in the Leningrad area, had during 1941 and 1942 achieved an aura of invincibility. Trautloft was indeed one of the *Jagdwaaffe's* best unit commanders. He provided the *Geschwader* with its famous crest – the green heart – and official name, *Jagdgeschwader 'Grünherz'*, but as a measure of Trautloft's capacity, the men in the trenches and the bomber pilots who were protected by JG 54's pilots knew the unit as "*Jagdgeschwader Trautloft*". On the Soviet side, Trautloft and the Green Hearts gained such a strongly symbolic significance that, at one stage, the Soviets even came to believe that the *Grünherzgeschwader* was composed entirely of aces. In fact, although this assumption was fairly accurate, it resulted from the German pilots' accumulated experience and not from any deliberate policy of concentrating aces in one unit.

However, as soon as Trautloft was posted to a new assignment with *Generalmajor* Galland's *Stab*, the spell was broken. First the *Geschwader's* Green Heart badge, together with the *Gruppe* and *Staffel* insignia, began to disappear and victory markings were no longer applied to JG 54's aircraft. As Artur Gärtner, who flew as a *Feldwebel* with I./JG 54 at that stage of the war recalled, "*We removed those symbols because we felt that they drew us to the attention of the Russians*". Then, on 15 December 1943, Trautloft's successor, *Major* Hubertus von Bonin, was shot

down and killed, but JG 54 was far from being dejected or at the end of its endurance.

In the Narva area on 12 January 1944, 6./JG 54 clashed with a formation of Pe-2 bombers escorted by La-5 fighters. In the ensuing mêlée, the *Staffelkapitän*, *Hptm.* Horst Ademeit, shot down one of the fighters and three bombers in ten minutes. The last of these, an La-5 shot down at 09.20 hrs, was registered as Ademeit's 100th victory and, shortly afterwards, Ademeit succeeded *Hptm.* Walter Nowotny who, with 256 victories, was then the leading fighter ace of the war, as I./JG 54's *Gruppenkommandeur*.

On 14 January, the Soviet 2nd Assault Army began an offensive from the Oranienbaum bridgehead, a narrow enclave west of Leningrad, and on the 15th the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts joined the operation. This Soviet offensive, which was supported from the air by 13 VA, 14 VA, and VVS KBF, marked the beginning of an operation aimed at lifting the 900-day siege of Leningrad. It was during this Soviet push that JG 54's airfield at Siverskaya, for many months the unit's main base, was seized by the Soviets on 30 January.

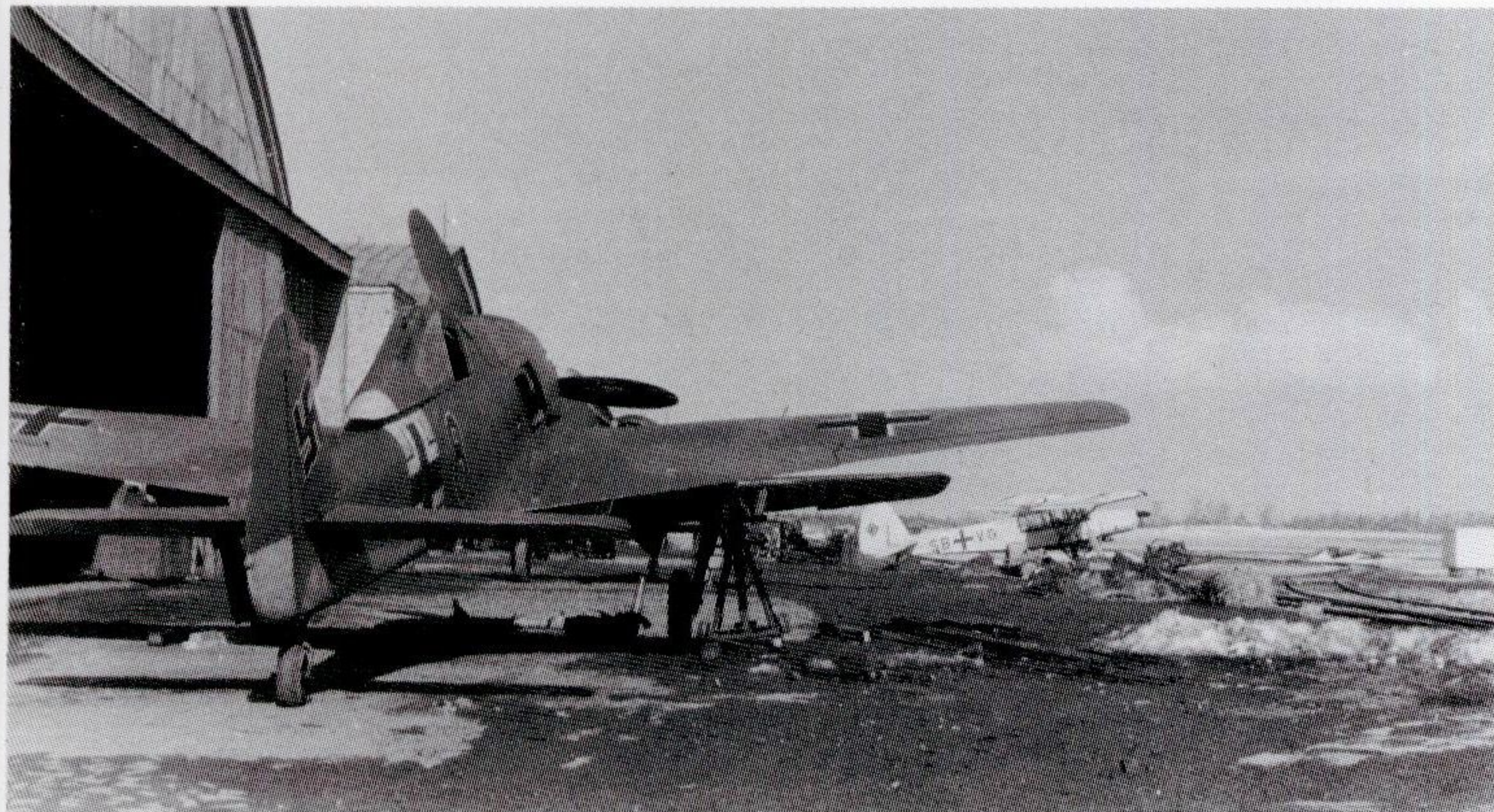
In the Leningrad area, *Luftflotte 1* could muster a quite impressive fighter force, including not only JG 54 with its *Stabsstaffel* and three *Gruppen*, but also II./JG 5. This unit had been hardened in more than two years of fighting in the far north where it fought some of the best Soviet fighter units. Undoubtedly one of JG 5's most skilful pilots was *Obt.* Theodor Weissenberger who, by the time II./JG 5 was posted to *Luftflotte 1* in late 1943, had attained 118 victories in 273 combat sorties. On 1 February, during a mission escorting Ju 87s, *Obt.* Weissenberger shot down five La-5s, so raising his tally to 124 victories.

While II./JG 5 and I. and II./JG 54 performed well against the Soviet Air Force, the same cannot be said of IV./JG 54. Being a fairly new unit and lacking the core of highly experienced pilots that was the rule in other Eastern Front *Jagdgruppen*, the performance of IV./JG 54 was disappointing, sustaining high losses and failing to achieve any significant numbers of victories. Eventually, in the hope of increasing the unit's effectiveness, *Major* Siegfried Schnell was transferred from JG 2 in France to lead the *Gruppe*.

Interestingly, the performance of IV./JG 54 and the subsequent appointment of Schnell as *Gruppenkommandeur* reveal some useful facts. The first is that, by comparing the relatively poor performance of this *Gruppe* with other *Jagdgruppen* in which extremely experienced *Jagdwaaffe* aces on the Eastern Front were concentrated together, the performance of the latter was frequently spectacular and often produced results of decisive importance. The second fact to emerge is connected to the appointment of *Major* Schnell.



ABOVE: *Hptm.* Emil Lang was *Staffelkapitän* of 5./JG 54 on the Eastern Front from August 1943 to April 1944 when he left to lead 9./JG 54, then engaged in the Defence of the Reich. Lang was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 22 November with 119 victories and achieved his last Russian Front victory, an La-5, as his 144th on 6 April 1944.



ABOVE: An Fw 190 of JG 54 being serviced at the *Geschwader's* long-time main base at Siverskaya in 1943. On 30 January 1944, Siverskaya was seized by the Soviets.

It was a commonly held opinion among *Luftwaffe* pilots flying in the West that the air war in the East was somehow easier and that victories, and therefore high decorations, could be more rapidly attained there than in the West. Undoubtedly, the basis for this misapprehension was the astonishingly high victories claimed in the East following the launching of Operation 'Barbarossa' in mid-1941, together with the self-deluding effect of German propaganda which at that time denigrated the Soviets to the level of 'sub-humans'. If the myth of easy victories and incompetent Soviet opposition was true, then one would expect *Major* Schnell, one of the best Western aces, to have quickly built up an astronomic victory tally.

Schnell had served as a fighter pilot since before the war and, between 1940 and 1944, attained 90 victories against the RAF and USAAF, in recognition of which he was awarded the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves. Once posted to IV./JG 54 on 11 February, however, Schnell found it difficult to adjust to the vastly different conditions on the Eastern Front and, after two weeks of intense fighting following his posting, in which period he was able to claim only three victories, Schnell was shot down and killed by an La-5 on the 25th. In sharp contrast, the Eastern Front veteran *Oblt.* Weissenberger shot down 21 Soviet aircraft during 33 combat sorties flown in February 1944 and raised his total to 140 victories.

On 26 February, the day the Soviets officially declared the siege of Leningrad lifted, they mounted an air attack against IV./JG 54's base at Dorpat, during which a number of the *Gruppe's* aircraft were destroyed on the ground. The *Gruppe's* total losses during January and February amounted to 32 Bf 109s.

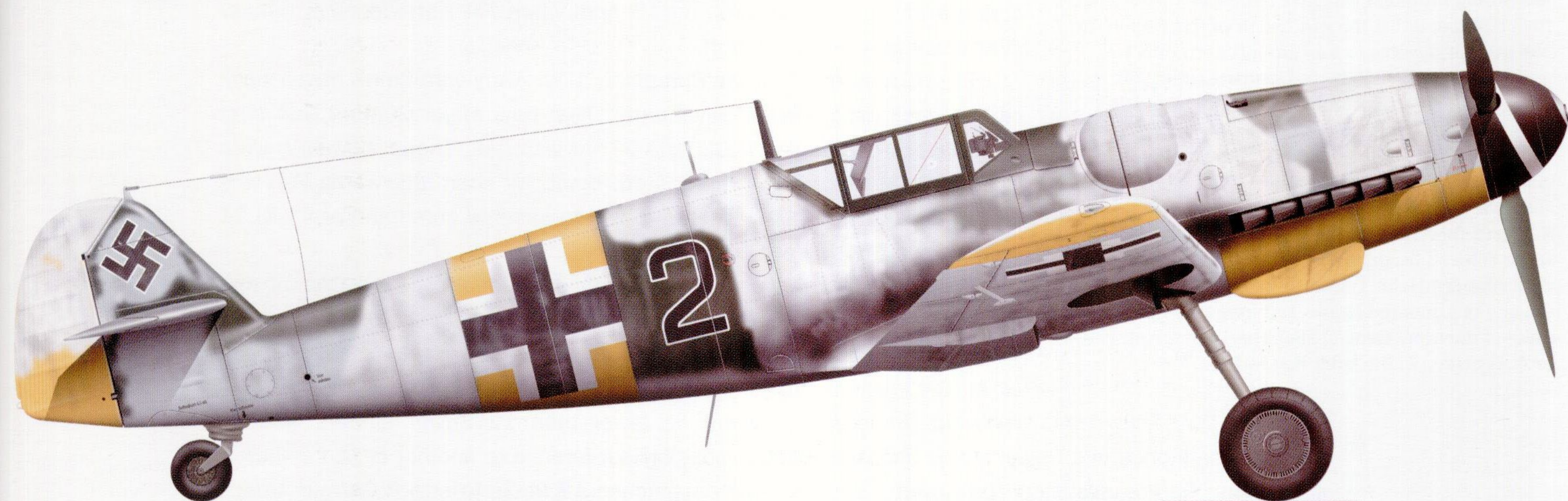
On 1 March, *Heeresgruppe Nord* had withdrawn to the Soviet-Estonian border, where the Soviets became bogged down in a series of large-scale air and ground battles and, since the return of II./JG 5 to the far north in late February, the whole task of providing *Heeresgruppe Nord* with fighter cover had fallen to JG 54. The most important individual contributors to Soviet aircraft losses over the northern combat zone throughout March 1944 were *Hptm.* Horst Ademeit and *Lt.* Otto Kittel, both of I./JG 54, and *Major* Erich Rudorffer, *Lt.* Heinrich Sterr, *Lt.* Albin Wolf, and *Ofw.* Helmut Grollmus, all of II./JG 54. A Yak-1 claimed by *Lt.* Wolf at 16.47 hrs on 23 March marked his 135th victory and the 5,000th for JG 54. On 29 March *Lt.* Sterr became the 68th German fighter pilot to reach the 100-victory mark, but JG 54 was dealt a severe blow on 2 April when Wolf was killed, his Fw 190 receiving a direct hit by anti-aircraft fire south-east of Pskov. Wolf's 144 victories made him one of the *Geschwader's* most successful pilots. Six days later *Lt.* Kittel attained his 150th victory, for which he was awarded the Oak Leaves. On the same day, *Major* Rudorffer, famous for his serial victories, including seven achieved on 7 April which brought his total score to 134, also received the Oak Leaves.

The fighting in the air during the battle around Leningrad between 14 January and 1 April 1944 cost the Soviets the loss of 260 aircraft, a figure considerably lower than the total number of German victory claims. Between January and March 1944, *Luftflotte 1's* fighter units recorded a total of 68 combat losses.





LEFT AND OPPOSITE: In July 1943 a IV. Gruppe was added to JG 54. This Gruppe was raised at Jesau under Ritterkreuzträger Hptm. Erich Rudorffer but, in a rapid change of leadership, very soon came under the command of Hptm. Rudolf Sinner (*LEFT*), previously of JG 27. The IV./JG 54 operated at first on the Northern Sector of the Eastern Front and in these photographs, (*OPPOSITE AND BOTTOM*) probably taken at Dorpat in south-east Estonia early in 1944, ground staff attend to the engine of a Bf 109 G-6 coded 'Black 3'. On this machine the snow camouflage consists of a scheme in which approximately 50 per cent of the airframe has been softly sprayed with areas of white over an earlier two-tone dark green. Interestingly, the spiral, which first began to see fairly widespread use in 1943, has been applied only to the forward part of the spinner.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-6 'Black 2' flown by Uffz. Fred Schneiker of 12./JG 54, Dorpat, early 1944
On this aircraft, the original 74/75/76 scheme was partially overpainted with patches of dark green, similar to RLM 71, for summer operations and then again overpainted with areas of a temporary white winter finish.

RIGHT: Uffz. Fred Schneiker of 12./JG 54 scrambling from Dorpat in early 1944. Finished in a similar snow-camouflage scheme to the machine shown opposite, Uffz. Schneiker's 'Black 2' has a full white spiral on the spinner.



The End in the Crimea

Returning to II./JG 52 in the Crimea in late March 1944, the 251-victory ace Gerhard Barkhorn, since promoted to *Major*, noted how much stronger the Soviet air opposition had grown since he went on leave. The Soviet fighter pilots were now the masters of the skies, and on 1 April 1944 they shot down Barkhorn before he could attain any new victories. Barkhorn, however, survived this incident and soon was back in action, as eager as ever to attain new victories.



ABOVE: Army and Luftwaffe officers briefing Hitler and Göring. Although Directive No. 51 of 3 November 1943 had stated that the vast extent of territory in the East made it possible to lose ground, even on a large scale, without a fatal blow to Germany, Hitler still clung to his 'no retreat' orders during 1944 and 1945, even when his best generals favoured a strategic withdrawal. The officer standing on the far left is believed to be General Karl Koller, Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff. Standing second left is SS-Brigadeführer Hermann Fegelein, SS liaison officer at the Führer's headquarters and, on the far right, Generaloberst Heinz Guderian, in 1944 Inspector-General of Armoured Troops and from 21 July 1944 Chief of the Army General Staff. This photograph was probably taken in the latter half of 1944.

On 10 April, the 4th Ukrainian Front opened an offensive against the German 17th Army which had been ordered to remain in place by Hitler in another of his 'No Retreat' orders and which had, as a result, been trapped in the Crimea since the end of 1943. The Soviet attack to clear the Crimea was launched from the Perekop Isthmus in the north while another Soviet attack was launched from the bridgehead at Kerch on the easternmost tip of the Crimea. Both attacks were powerfully supported from the air, and the German fighters on the Crimea became involved in a series of large-scale air battles, during which *Lt.* Helmut Lipfert of II./JG 52 shot down an Il-2 on 11 April as his 100th victory. However, as this *Gruppe* was too weak to cope alone with the task of providing the German and Rumanian ground troops with air cover, III./JG 52 was hurriedly transferred to Sevastopol-Chersones aerodrome. The III. *Gruppe's* *Karayastaffel* – 9./JG 52 – opened its score in the area on 15 April when *Fw.* Hans-Joachim Birkner shot down four Soviet aircraft.

On 16 April the German-Rumanian 17th Army was being driven back into a small area around Sevastopol. That day, *Major* Günther Rall shot down two La-5s as his 272nd and 273rd victories. These, however, were to be his last victories on the Eastern Front, for soon afterwards Rall was ordered back to Germany where he was to assume command of II./JG 11 operating in the defence of the Reich.

So overwhelming was the Soviet air superiority over the Crimea that *Fw* 190s of the ground-attack *Gruppe* II./SG 2 – part of the famous 'Immelmann' *Geschwader* – had to fly purely fighter missions. On 17 April, *Lt.* August Lambert, one of the unit's most successful pilots in this role, was reported to have shot down no fewer than 12 Soviet aircraft. Another

incident, mentioned in a Soviet report dated 19 April, is possibly a reference to another of *Lt.* Lambert's successes. On this occasion, the Soviet 135 GBAP had despatched 18 Pe-2s to attack German troops near Sevastopol. During the return flight, a section of four Pe-2s, commanded by the squadron leader, *Kapitan* Yevgeniy Vishnyakov, was intercepted by a single *Fw* 190. The escorting Soviet fighters from 3 IAK had lost contact with the bombers and the lone *Fw* 190 managed to shoot down three Pe-2s consecutively, including the machine piloted by Vishnyakov, who was killed. The Soviet report goes on to note that the *Fw* 190 pilot was apparently very experienced and conducted his attacks in such a way that the defensive fire from all the Soviet bombers was avoided. *Lt.* Lambert also reportedly shot down another nine Soviet aircraft on 4 May.

Meanwhile, *Major* Barkhorn succeeded in surpassing the top-scoring pilot Walter Nowotny's tally of 256 by shooting down a Yak-7 on 27 April 1944 and on 5 May, *Hptm.* Willi Batz, replacing Rall as III./JG 52's new *Gruppenkommandeur*, shot down two La-5s as his 129th and 130th victories.

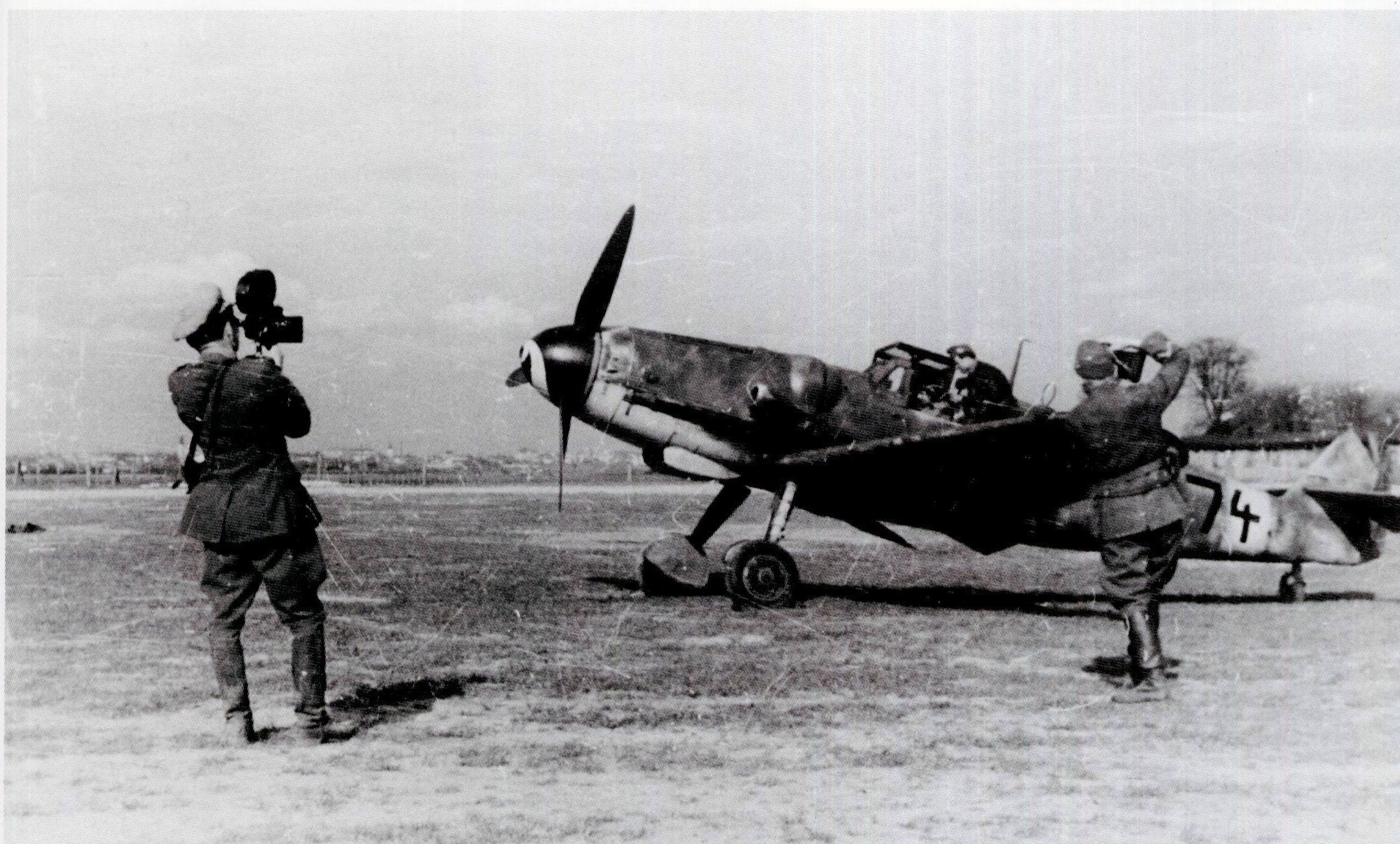
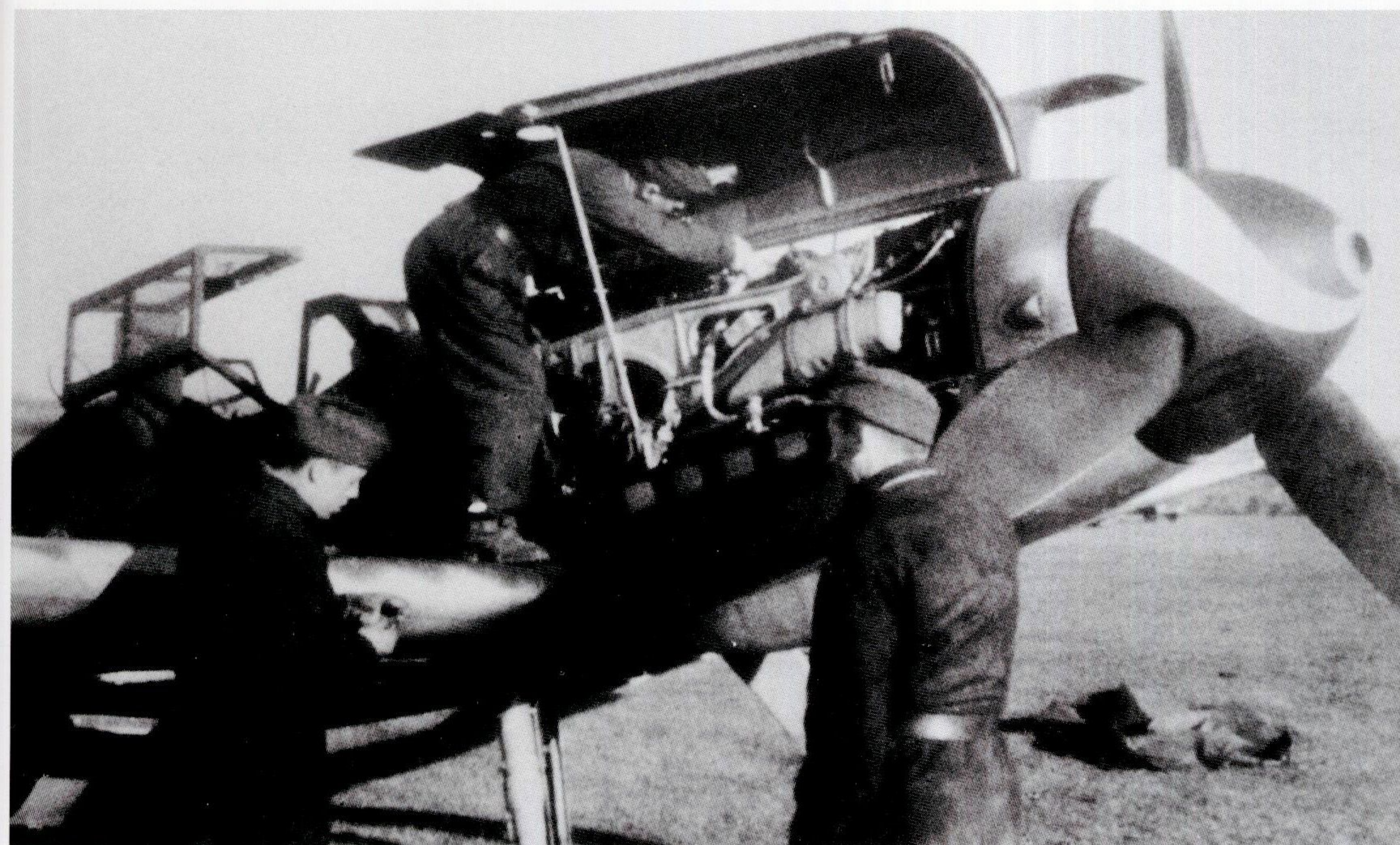
On 6 May, the evacuation of German and Rumanian forces trapped in Sevastopol began, these troops being ferried across the Black Sea to Rumania. It was of little avail that on the same day *Lt.* Lambert was credited with another 14 victories, but the German fighter pilots

BELOW: During the Soviet drive to clear the trapped German 17. Armee from the Crimea in April 1944, II./SG 2 based at Sevastopol-Chersones particularly distinguished itself when, under the command of *Major* Heinz Frank (centre), it destroyed 106 Soviet aircraft in the air and another 28 on the ground between the 12 and 26 April and was mentioned in the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht communiqué on the 27th. This photograph shows *Major* Frank outside the unit's battle headquarters with, on the right, *Lt.* Erich Hartmann of 9./JG 52. Hartmann's *Staffel*, together with the rest of III./JG 52, had been rushed to Sevastopol-Chersones in April. All German resistance in the Crimea ended when Sevastopol fell on 12 May.



nevertheless continued their hopeless battle. On 7 May, *Lt.* Peter Düttmann of II./JG 52 claimed nine kills, bringing his victory tally to 91, while *Fhj.Fw.* Heinz Sachsenberg of the same unit accounted for six to reach a personal total of 82. That day too, *Fw.* Hans Waldmann of 4./JG 52 shot down six aircraft, bringing his personal total to 120 victories. The last German fighter missions over the Crimea were flown on 8 May when Barkhorn shot down a Yak-7 and an Il-2.

The last remaining resistance in the Crimea was broken when Sevastopol finally fell on 12 May 1944. Of the 150,000-strong Axis force in the Crimea, less than 40,000 had been evacuated, while II./JG 52's losses to enemy action were 27 aircraft in April and 36 in May. The air battles over the Crimea had proved so strenuous that many of its participants had reached the limits of their endurance. Indeed, in II./JG 52, *Lt.* Peter Düttmann was found to be in such a state of exhaustion that he had to be relieved of first-line service and sent home to Germany to rest and recuperate. On the Soviet side, the final battle of the Crimea cost the Soviets 179 aircraft lost between 8 April and 12 May 1944.



ABOVE LEFT AND ABOVE: The Bf 109 G flown by Hptm. Günther Rall (**ABOVE**), Kommandeur of I./JG 52, probably in early April 1944. Note the spinner design which is clearly intended to be a spiral but in fact barely completes one full revolution.

LEFT: Capt. József Kovács, the commander of the Hungarian 102/1 Fighter Squadron, returning from his 100th combat sortie at the end of April 1944. A few days before this well-publicised event, Kovács had shot down a Soviet Il-2 as his fourth victory on the Eastern Front. Later promoted to Major, Kovács became commander of the 102 Fighter Group in November 1944.

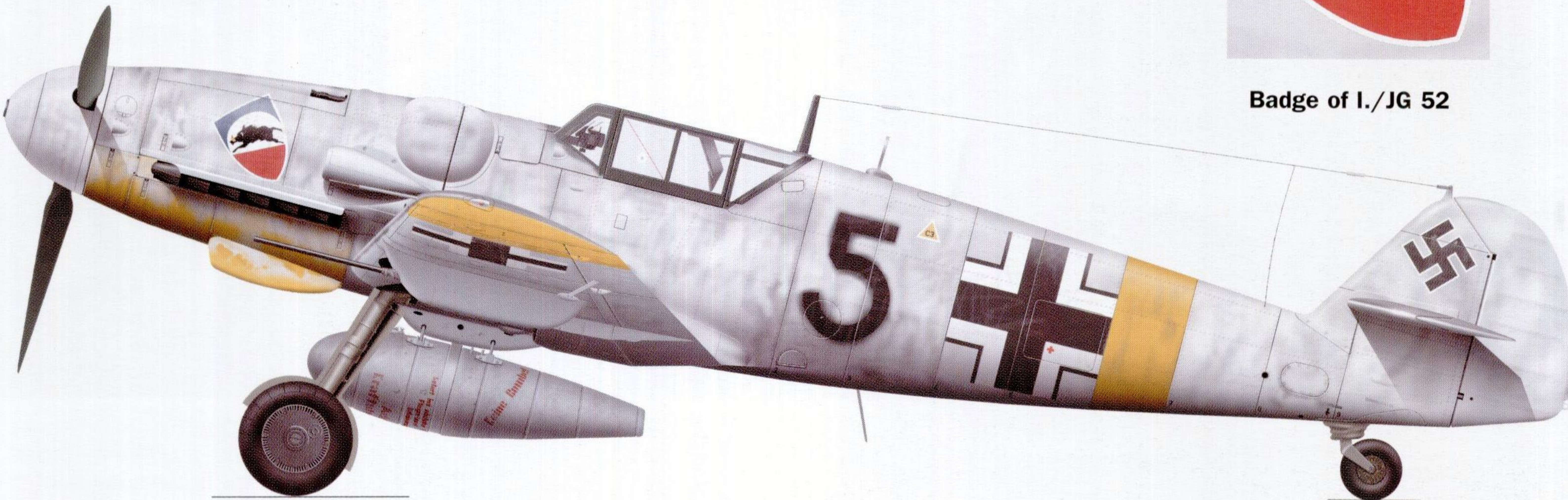


LEFT: Bf 109 G-6 'Black 5' of I./JG 52 taking off from Zilistea in Central Rumania in April 1944. Still wearing a white snow camouflage from the winter of 1943/44 when the Gruppe was based in southern Russia, this particular aircraft probably belonged to 2. Staffel. A particularly interesting feature of this machine is the running boar badge of I./JG 52 on the engine cowling. Apart from the fact that by this time in the war most units had dispensed with their heraldry, the location of the badge on the engine cowling is unusual. Photographs exist showing that I./JG 52 used the cowling as a location for a short time in 1940 (see Volume 2, Section 2, Page 152-153) but the more usual position was on the rear fuselage between the Balkenkreuz and the tail unit.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-6 'Black 5' of 2./JG 52, Zilistea, Rumania, April 1944
 This aircraft was originally finished in a 74/75/76 scheme but the uppersurfaces have been overpainted with a white winter finish. Note that this originally covered the area under the exhausts and the sides of the oil cooler intake, but weathering and the scouring effect of ice particles and snow thrown up by the propeller has exposed the yellow identification panel.



Badge of I./JG 52



OPPOSITE BOTTOM AND THIS PAGE: Fw 190 Fs of II./SG 2 in southern Russia, probably in the late spring of 1944. Note that 'White N' (*OPPOSITE BOTTOM*) has a tropical air cleaner and that the aircraft in the foreground (*BELOW*) still shows traces of white winter camouflage. This machine appears to have the tactical code 'Black T' and may be the same machine as shown (*BOTTOM RIGHT*) which is known to have been flown by Otto Dommeratzky. He was an experienced ground attack pilot who flew his first missions with II.(Schlacht)/LG 2 in Poland in 1939. When the original Schlachtgeschwader were formed in 1942, Ofw. Dommeratzky was transferred to Sch.G 1 and by the time the ground attack units were reorganised in October 1943, he had already received the German Cross in Gold and the Ritterkreuz. He then flew with the 6. Staffel of II./SG 2 and, although a successful ground-attack pilot, was also credited with 38 aerial victories. On 13 October 1944 his aircraft was attacked and damaged by US Mustangs and Dommeratzky crashed while attempting a forced landing. Also killed was a member of the unit's ground crew who was a passenger in the aircraft. Dommeratzky, shown (*RIGHT*) in early 1944, was posthumously awarded the Oak Leaves in November.





LEFT: Also photographed in the spring of 1944 was Major Heinz Frank, the Kommandeur of II./SG 2, pictured here with his Fw 190. Although only one chevron is visible on the fuselage side, the marking was almost certainly the Kommandeur's double chevron. Coincidentally, Major Frank, who was awarded the Oak Leaves on 8 January 1943, died in hospital on 7 October 1944 following an accident with a pistol, just a few days before Dommeratzky was killed.

BELOW: A mechanic making last-minute adjustments to a ground-attack Fw 190. It may be noted that Major Frank's aircraft shown left was fitted with tropical air cleaners, whereas this machine has the more usual bulged fairings. This aircraft, almost certainly also of II./SG 2, has already been loaded with an SC 250 bomb.

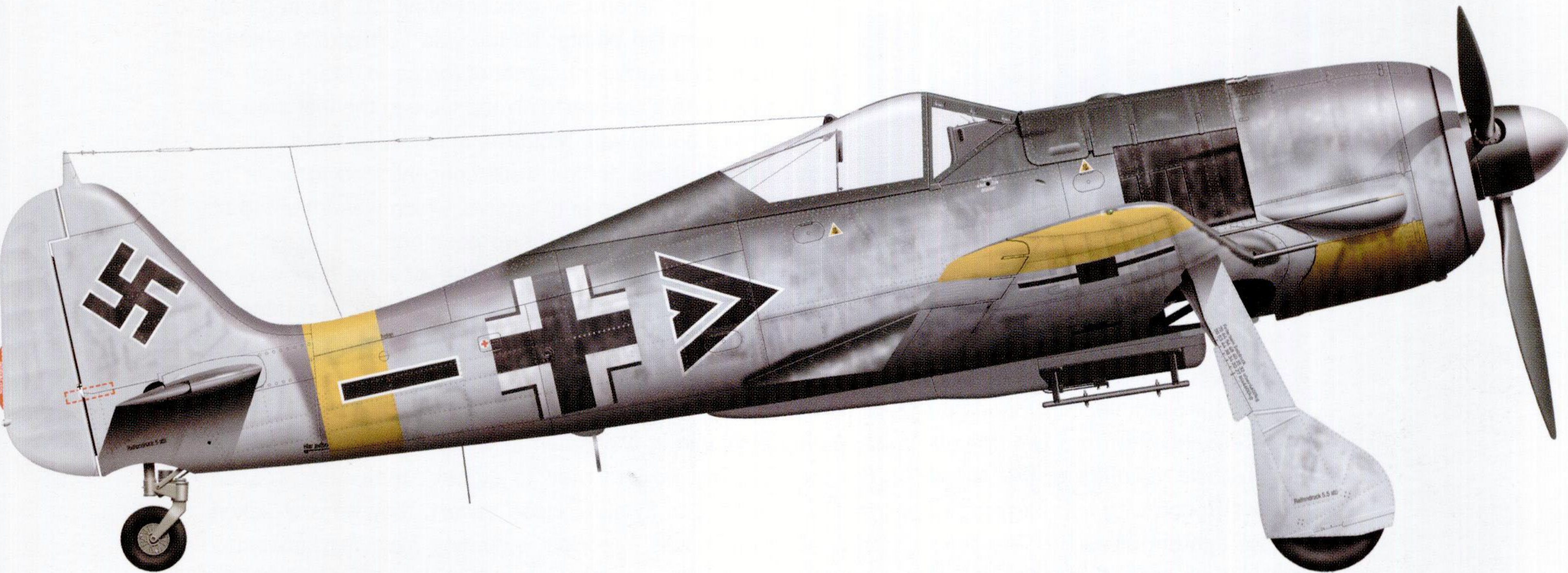


BELOW: An Fw 190 coded 'Black 2' which was found at Chersones, west of Sevastopol in the Crimea, by advancing Soviet forces in 1944.





ABOVE: This Fw 190 was also photographed at Chersones on 12 May 1944 after German forces had been expelled from the Crimea. The Werknummer 160749 identifies the machine as a G-3 and was one of the aircraft flown by Major Heinz Frank, the Kommandeur of II./SG 2. The tail unit in the foreground is from another of the unit's aircraft, a G-8 W.Nr. 190079.



Focke-Wulf Fw 190 G-3 W.Nr. 160749 flown by Major Heinz Frank, Kommandeur of II./SG 2, Chersones, May 1944

As the engine had been removed before this machine was captured, the nose section of the aircraft in this profile has been reconstructed to show how it may have appeared. Clearly visible in the accompanying photograph, however, are the yellow theatre markings under the wingtips and the band around the rear fuselage. The Kommandeur's double chevron was in black, outlined in white, and the spinner is typical of that seen on Fw 190s of the period. The overall camouflage finish was 74/75/76.

The War of the *Experten*

In the late spring of 1944, the Axis forces had been ousted from most of Russia and the Ukraine and pushed back to positions in Rumania, south-eastern Poland, Byelorussia, and the Baltic countries. In the process, the *Luftwaffe* had sustained some severe losses which reduced its actual numerical strength in the East, and in these circumstances, the core of highly experienced fliers who remained came to play an even greater role than previously.

In total, the *Luftwaffe* on the Eastern Front between the Baltic Sea in the north and the Black Sea in the south possessed a total number of 2,199 aircraft on 31 May 1944. Of this, *Luftflotte* 1 mustered 415 aircraft, which was, in fact, almost the same number as in 1941. *Luftflotte* 1's main *Jagdgeschwader*, JG 54, with its *Stabsstaffel*, I., II. and IV. *Gruppen* deployed on the Eastern Front, received a temporary reinforcement when II./JG 5 again became attached in late April 1944 after returning from the far north. *Hptm.* Theodor Weissenberger, the *Gruppe*'s famous *Kommandeur*, attained his 175th victory on 18 May, one of three shot down that day; this was in fact the last of his Eastern Front victories as, shortly afterwards, II./JG 5 was transferred to the *Reichsverteidigung*. *Hptm.* Weissenberger, however, was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of I./JG 5 which, under his command would become one of the most successful *Jagdgeschwader* over Normandy following the Allied landings in June.

Luftflotte 6 had 836 aircraft in May 1944, a figure which included 104 fighters, the majority of which belonged to JG 51. Opposing this *Jagdgeschwader* was a significant force of Soviet aircraft, and on 10 May 1944, pilots of 11./JG 51 were credited with six victories in the Tarnopol region. The day's most successful mission occurred when *Hptm.* Adolf Borchers and his wingman, *Fw.* Heinz Marquardt, caught a group of four old R-5 reconnaissance biplanes and each shot down two of them, all within three minutes. That evening, however, a small number of Yak-9s bounced the *Staffel*'s *Uffz.* Helmut Heinze – a pilot with 23 victories – together with his wingman, and shot down and injured both men. Five days later, 59-victory ace *Lt.* Herbert Friebe of the neighbouring 10./JG 51 was killed in combat with Soviet fighters in the same area.

Although *Luftflotte* 4, with 948 aircraft, including 186 fighters, was numerically the strongest of the air fleets in the East, it was also required to cover a large area. However, just as the overstretched ground forces were able to achieve some astonishing successes against a vastly superior enemy by concentrating their strength at carefully selected points, so too was *Luftflotte* 4 able to concentrate a sufficient number of forces to attain local air superiority. This was certainly the case in the Iasi area on Rumania's border with Moldavia in late May 1944, where the bulk of these forces were concentrated in order to support a local counter-offensive, which was intended to improve the German defensive positions.

The counter-attack surprised the Soviet land forces as well as the 5 VA, the air army operating in the area, which was also caught in a fairly weak position having relinquished some of its best units to 2 VA operating in the Tarnopol sector. Moreover, the depleted 5 VA also contained a large number of inexperienced replacements who had arrived to fill the gaps after the previous winter's losses, and in 9 GIAD for example, a component part of 5 VA, between 30 and 40 per cent of the pilots were new.

Consequently, in a two day air battle, *Luftflotte* 4 was in a position to win one of the *Luftwaffe*'s last tactical victories of the air war in the East. As the Soviets tried to support their hard-pressed ground troops with Il-2s accompanied by fighters obliged to fly slow, close escort, they were attacked by the fighters of JG 52. The whole of this *Geschwader* was in action, mounting *freie Jagd* missions and with its pilots flying six, seven, and sometimes even more sorties each day, claims were high. The result was a victory for the German pilots who, on 30 and 31 May, were reported to have shot down a total of no fewer than 156 Soviet aircraft in the Iasi area.

Once again, this success was attributable to a relatively small but extremely experienced number of German fighter *Experten*, and in particular to JG 52's ten most successful pilots, namely *Major* Gerhard Barkhorn, *Hptm.* Willi Batz, *ObLt.* Helmut Lipfert, *Lt.* Erich Hartmann, *Lt.* Franz Schall, *Lt.* Walter Wolfrum, *Lt.* Heinz Sachsenberg, *Lt.* Otto Fönnekold, *Lt.* Hans Waldmann, and *Fhj.Fw.* Hans-Joachim Birkner. Similarly, 21 of the 25 victories credited to III./JG 52 on 31 May were due to just three pilots: Batz,

BELOW: Soviet advances in the Ukraine in early 1944 compelled German forces to retreat until, by mid-April, the front had been extended from Odessa in the south almost to Brest Litovsk in the north. This Bf 109 G of JG 51 was photographed at Terespol, a few kilometres south-west of Brest Litovsk in eastern Poland in April 1944. The aircraft has the tactical number 'Yellow 10' and was finished in a standard 74/75/76 scheme with a yellow theatre band around the rear fuselage.



BELOW: Pilots of JG 52, probably photographed in the early summer of 1944. Standing on the left of the picture is Friedrich Obleser, Staffelkapitän of 8./JG 52, wearing the Ritterkreuz awarded on 23 March 1944 after he had attained his 80th victory. Behind him is Ritterkreuzträger Karl Gratz, also of 8./JG 52, while seated in the cockpit is Dieter Hrabak. Normally associated with II./JG 54, which he led from August 1940 to the end of October 1943, Hrabak then became Kommodore of JG 52, which he led until the end of September 1944, subsequently returning to the Grünherz Geschwader in October 1944 as its last Kommodore. Assisting Hrabak with his harness is Erich Hartmann of 9./JG 52. Further details of all these pilots' careers will be found in the main text.

Hartmann and Birkner. Walter Wolfrum of II./JG 52, who had achieved six victories on 20 May, now excelled himself by shooting down 11 on 30 May and another six on the 31st. The 31st was also *Hptm.* Willi Batz's most successful day, and between 06.30 to 19.30 hrs he flew seven missions and shot down 15 Soviet aircraft – six Il-2s, five Airacobras, and four Lavochkin fighters as his 141st to 155th victories.

Meanwhile, the veterans among the Soviet fighter pilots were able to shoot down a number of JG 52's Bf 109s. Two of the losses on 31 May were some of JG 52's best pilots. *Fw.* Karl Schumacher of 8./JG 52, with 56 aerial victories, being shot down and killed by Soviet fighters while flying his Bf 109 G-6, 'Black 2'. Over Iasi, an Airacobra pilot also defeated II./JG 52's famous *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Major* Gerhard Barkhorn who, on his sixth sortie of the day, intercepted a formation of Soviet bombers but was attacked from behind and his Bf 109 G-6 was badly damaged. Bleeding from wounds in his right arm and leg, Barkhorn was lucky to evade further hits and made a successful forced landing. Although the identity of this Soviet pilot is not known, it was certainly not the Soviet ace Aleksandr Pokryshkin, as he was not flying in that area at that time.

Although Barkhorn's wounds put him out of action for four months, the psychological impact of being shot down had a longer-lasting effect, for when he returned to his unit in October 1944 and sat for the first time in the cockpit of a Bf 109, he was overcome by a brief period of acute anxiety. This anxiety again manifested itself when he resumed flying combat missions and discovered that flying even with a friendly aircraft behind him produced a feeling of intense fear which took him several weeks to master.

The air battles over Iasi continued into the first days of June, but on a smaller scale. Nevertheless, an Airacobra shot down by *Lt.* Karl Munz on 1 June marked I./JG 52's 2,000th victory, and on the same day JG 52 claimed a total of 19 victories, six of which were contributed by the *Karayastaffel's Lt.* Erich Hartmann whose tally was thereby increased to 237 victories. On 2 June, JG 52 claimed another 18 victories, but during the course of the day the *Geschwaderkommodore*, *Obstlt.* Dietrich Hrabak, was shot down immediately after destroying an Il-2. Hrabak crash-landed, surviving with only minor injuries. On 4 June Erich Hartmann caught up with Barkhorn by shooting down seven enemy aircraft and reaching 250 victories, and two days later, Hartmann himself was responsible for half of the ten victories claimed by JG 52. Meanwhile I./JG 52's *Fw.* Jürgen Nordmann, credited with 36 aerial victories, was injured in combat with Airacobras. The 14 victories claimed by JG 52 over Iasi on 8 June were divided between five leading pilots: *Lt.* Heinz Sachsenberg claimed five, thus surpassing the 100-victory mark; *Fhj.Fw.* Hans-Joachim Birkner claimed four; *Obstlt.* Dietrich Hrabak claimed two; *Hptm.* Willi Batz, two, one of which, a Lavochkin, marked his 170th victory; and *Lt.* Heinz Ewald, one.

One significant development for JG 52 in June was the growing threat of American heavy bombers of the 15th US Army Air Force which, escorted by long-range Mustangs and Lightnings, flew from Italy to bomb mainly oil targets in Rumania. On 11 June, JG 52 took off to intercept just such a formation but lost four Bf 109s without achieving a single victory. Indeed, Rumanian fighter pilots were sometimes more successful against the American raiders than their German allies at this time.

On 10 June, for example, pilots of the Rumanian IAR. 81-equipped fighter group *Grupul 6 vânatoare*, had scrambled to intercept bomb-carrying Lightnings of the US 82nd Fighter Group escorted by more Lightnings of the 1st Fighter Group, which had taken off from Foggia, in Italy to make a surprise attack on the Ploesti oilfields. Alerted by radar, the IAR 81s bounced the Lightnings of the 1st Fighter Group and claimed that 23 were either shot down or collided and crashed in their attempts to avoid the attack. A further five Lightnings of the 82nd FG were also claimed by *Grupul 7 vânatoare*, but the total was eventually reduced to 18 Lightnings shot down by fighters, seven by anti-aircraft fire and three shared.

The German fighters in Rumania were again scrambled against the 15th Air Force's bombers on 24 June. This time, JG 52's *Lt.* Heinz Ewald, *Lt.* Erich Hartmann, *Lt.* Helmut Lipfert and *Fhj.Fw.* Hans-Joachim Birkner claimed one American aircraft apiece, while the Fw 190 pilots of SG 2 claimed to have shot down two Liberators and a Mustang.



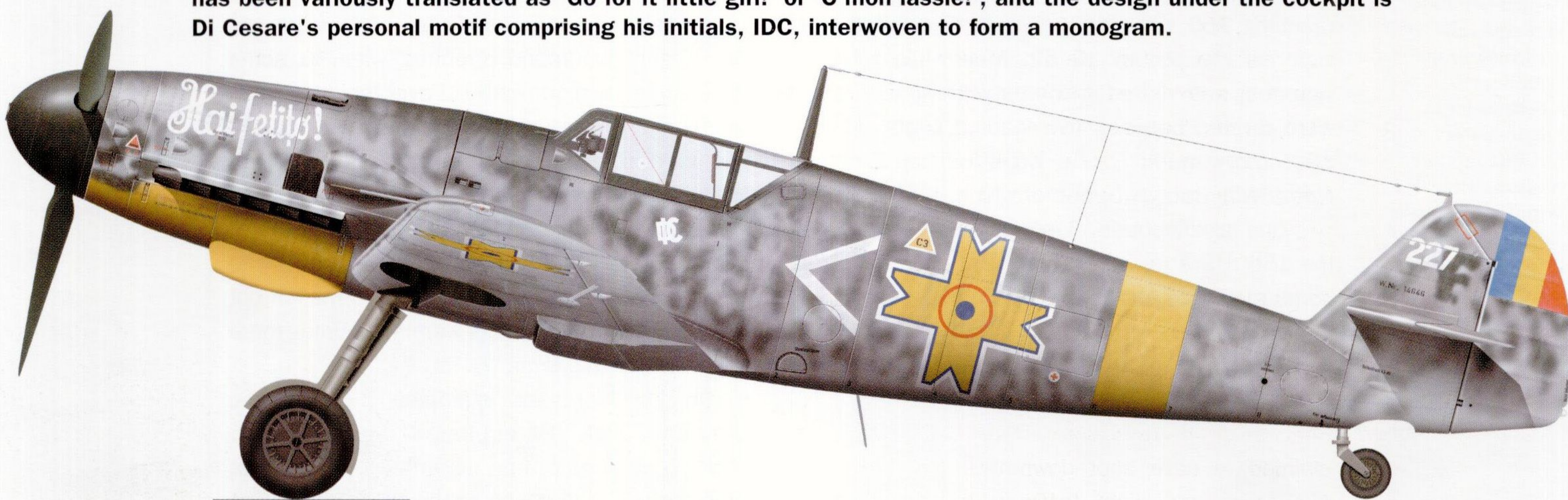


LEFT AND BELOW: Lt. Stefan Ciutac posing with a Bf 109 G-2, No. 227, W.Nr. 14646. Ciutac flew with the Grupul 7 vânătoare and, prior to 23 August 1944 when Rumania changed sides, was credited with destroying ten US aircraft. He subsequently flew with Grupul 9 vânătoare against the Luftwaffe but claimed only a Go 242 destroyed on the ground before the end of the war. The aircraft in this photograph, however, was flown by Lt. Ion Di Cesare (also spelled Dicezare) of Grupul 7 vânătoare who was credited with at least 23 victories before the end of the war.

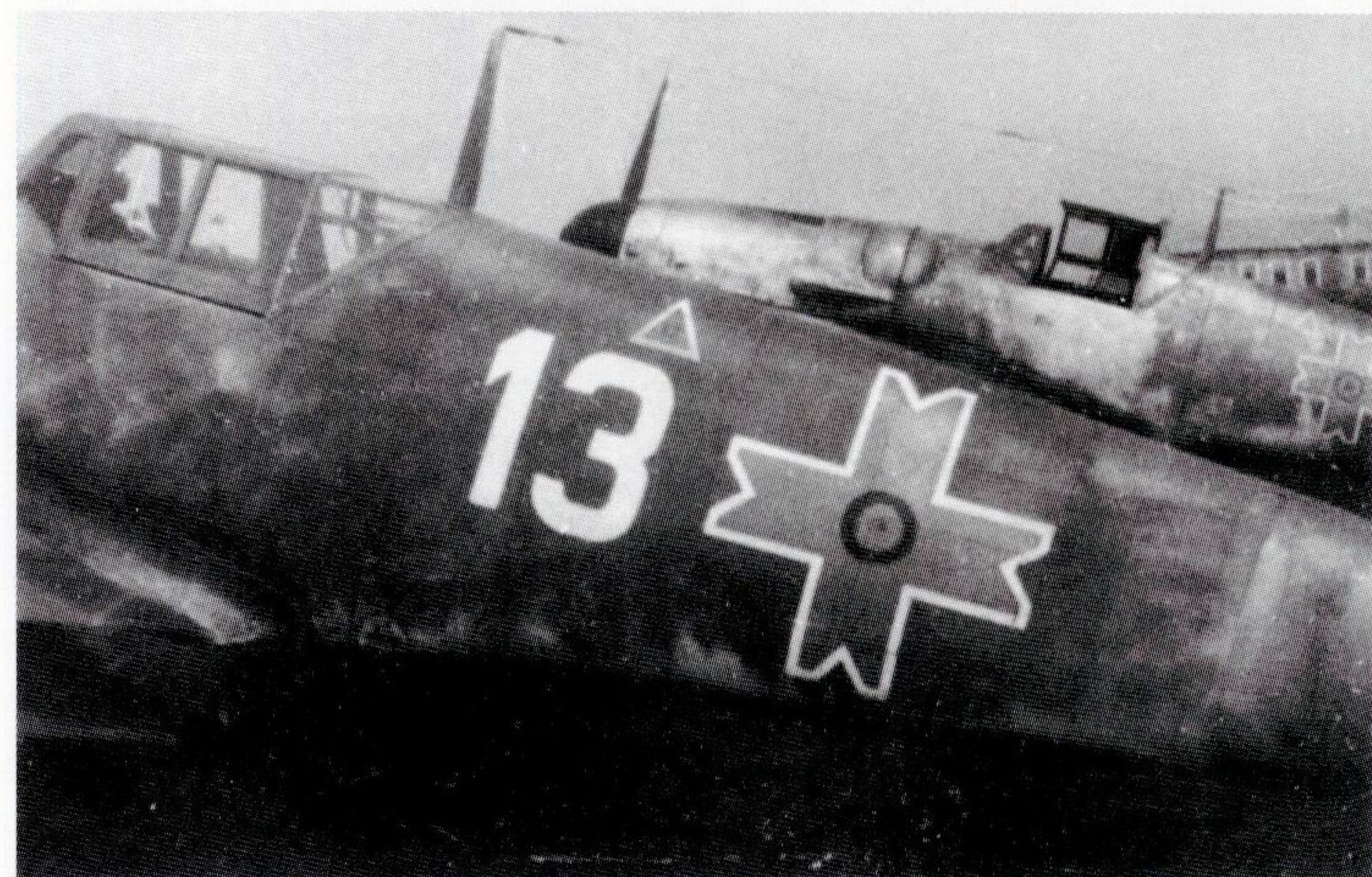
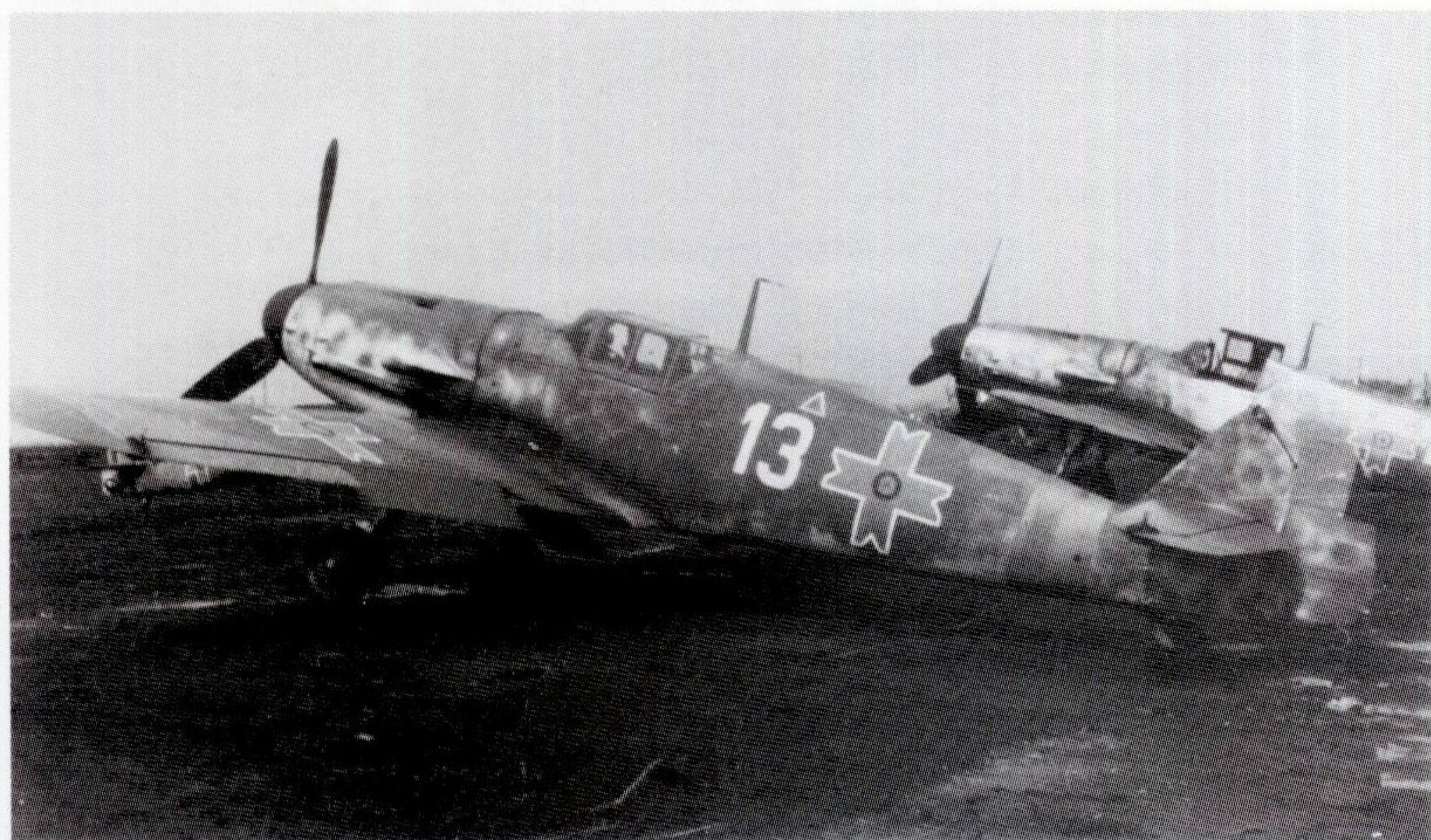


Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2 No. 227, W.Nr. 14646, flown by Lt. Ion Di Cesare, Grupul 7 vânătoare, summer 1944

Although this aircraft is finished in the standard 74/75/76 day fighter scheme, the colours on the fuselage have been applied in a dense dapple rather than a conventional mottle. The slogan 'Hai fetito!' on the engine cowling has been variously translated as 'Go for it little girl!' or 'C'mon lassie!', and the design under the cockpit is Di Cesare's personal motif comprising his initials, IDC, interwoven to form a monogram.



BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT: In June 1944, the Aeronautica Regală Română, or Royal Rumania Air Force, received a consignment of Bf 109 G-6s, 21 of which were assigned to the Grupul 7 vânătoare. This particular G-6 was flown by Lt. Tudor Greceanu.



RIGHT: Captain Gheorghe Popescu-Ciocănel of Grupul 9 vânătoare was flying this Bf 109 G-6 'White 2' on 22 July when P-38 and P-51 fighters of the US 15th Air Force were engaged over Rumania. In the ensuing air battles, Popescu-Ciocănel destroyed a P-38 near Ivesti and, as this was a shuttle raid, the remaining American aircraft then continued on to land in Russia. On 26 July, these US aircraft were returning to their base in Italy when they were again engaged by Popescu-Ciocănel flying his 'White 2', but on this occasion his machine was shot down in flames by P-51s of the US 31st Fighter Group. Popescu-Ciocănel was severely burned and died in a field hospital at Tecuci on 12 August. He had a total of 19 victories. Note the badge of the 9th Rumanian Fighter Group was first applied to the unit's aircraft on 9 June 1944.



In Finnish Skies

In the north, on the Karelian front east of the Soviet-Finnish border, both sides had remained locked into positional warfare since the combined German-Finnish offensives had been halted in the autumn of 1943. This situation continued until mid-1944, and in the meantime, the air war in this sector remained on a fairly limited scale due to the relatively small number of aircraft deployed by each side. In the far north, northern Finland and northern Norway, the front was covered by the German 20th Mountain Army and *Luftflotte* 5. Since the departure of II./JG 5 to *Luftflotte* 1 in late 1943, the only German fighter units available to meet the Soviet 7 VA in the area were *Stab* and III. *Gruppe* of JG 5 – the *Eismeergruppe*. II./JG 5 returned for only a brief interval in the far north in early March 1944, and shortly afterward it left *Luftflotte* 5 for the last time.

By 1944, *Luftflotte* 5 had been pushed onto the defensive, and the *Eismeergruppe*'s main task was to protect German coastal supply convoys and its own airfields against an increasingly aggressive Soviet air force. As in other sectors of the Eastern Front, the overwhelming majority of the *Eismeergruppe*'s victories in 1944 were due to a handful of very experienced fighter pilots, in this case *Hptm.* Heinrich Ehrler, *Obt.* Franz Dörr, *Lt.* Jakob Norz, *Fhj.Fw.* Walter Schuck, and *Uffz.* Rudolf Linz. Of the ten victories claimed by III./JG 5 on 7 April 1944, six were due to Walter Schuck, who thus reached a total of 84 victories, for which he was awarded the Knight's Cross the following day. 7./JG 5's *Staffelkapitän*, *Obt.* Franz Dörr, achieved a remarkable string of victories in May 1944. He claimed six on 16 May, four on 25 May, and five on 26 May.

On 25 May 1944 the Soviets attacked a German convoy with approximately one hundred Douglas A-20s, Curtiss P-40s and Bell P-39 Airacobras. III./JG 5 scrambled 19 Bf 109s and claimed to have shot down twenty A-20s, nine Airacobras and eight P-40s with no losses to themselves. The following day, when the Soviets repeated their attack with between 80 and 100 aircraft, III./JG 5 was again scrambled to confront them. This time the Germans claimed to have shot down ten A-20s, ten P-40s, nine Il-2s and eight Airacobras.

Hptm. Heinrich Ehrler returned from the battle with claims for five victories, taking his total to 155, and one of his subordinates, *Fhj.Fw.* Walter Schuck, reported no fewer than ten victories in the 24 hours of midnight sun between 25 and 26 May. Shortly afterward, Ehrler, then *Kommandeur* of III./JG 5, was given command of the whole *Geschwader*.

Walter Schuck reached his 100th victory by claiming six aircraft shot down on 15 June, while on the same day *Obt.* Dörr, now III./JG 5's new *Gruppenkommandeur*, was credited with four victories. III./JG 5 achieved one of the greatest victories in the *Geschwader*'s history on 17 June when the most successful pilots were 8./JG 5's *Uffz.* Rudolf Linz, who claimed nine victories; *Obt.* Dörr and 7./JG 5's *Lt.* Helmut Neumann, who each claimed eight; *Lt.* Jakob Norz, who claimed five; and Walter Schuck, who set a new record for JG 5 by destroying 12 aircraft in the day.

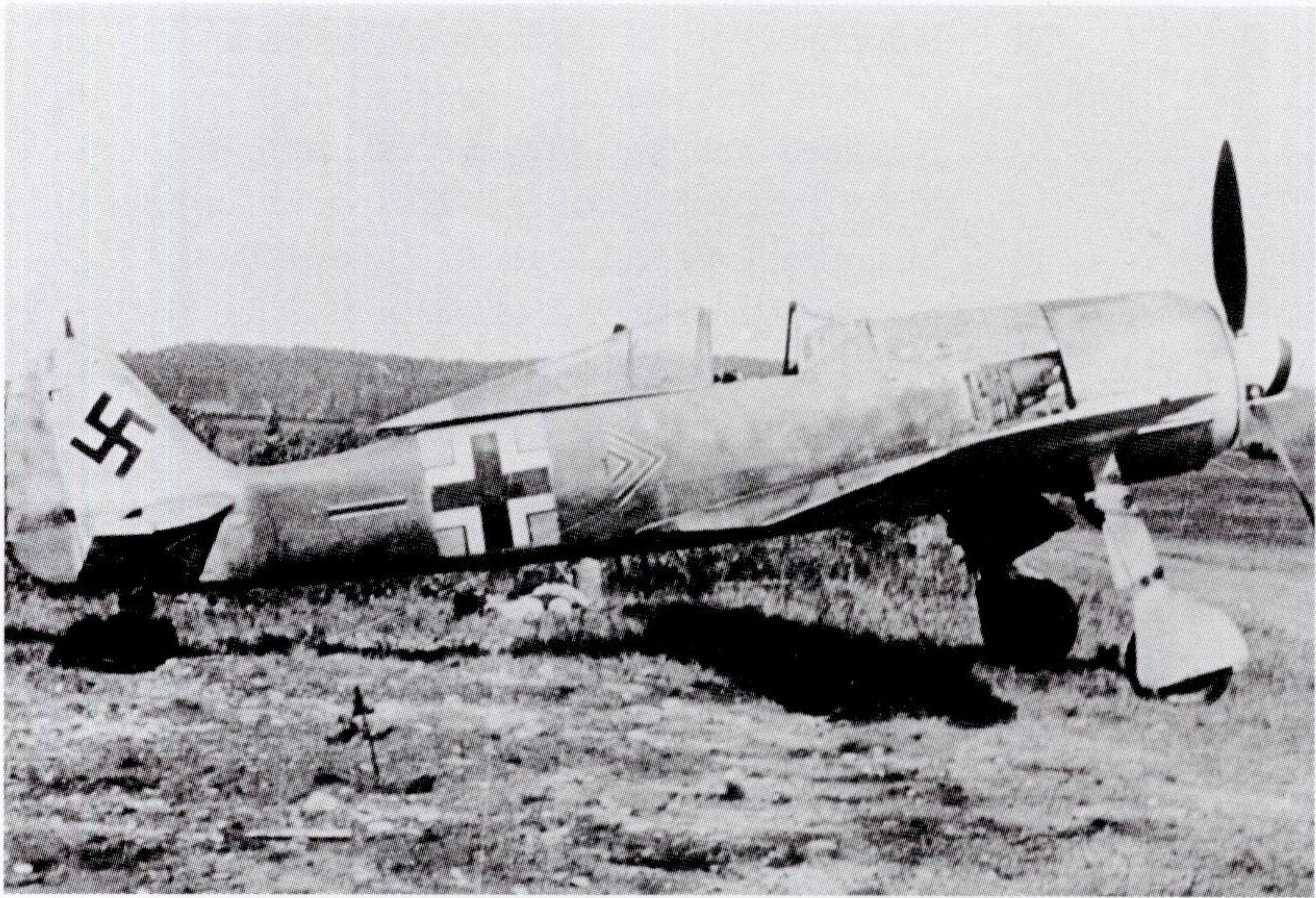
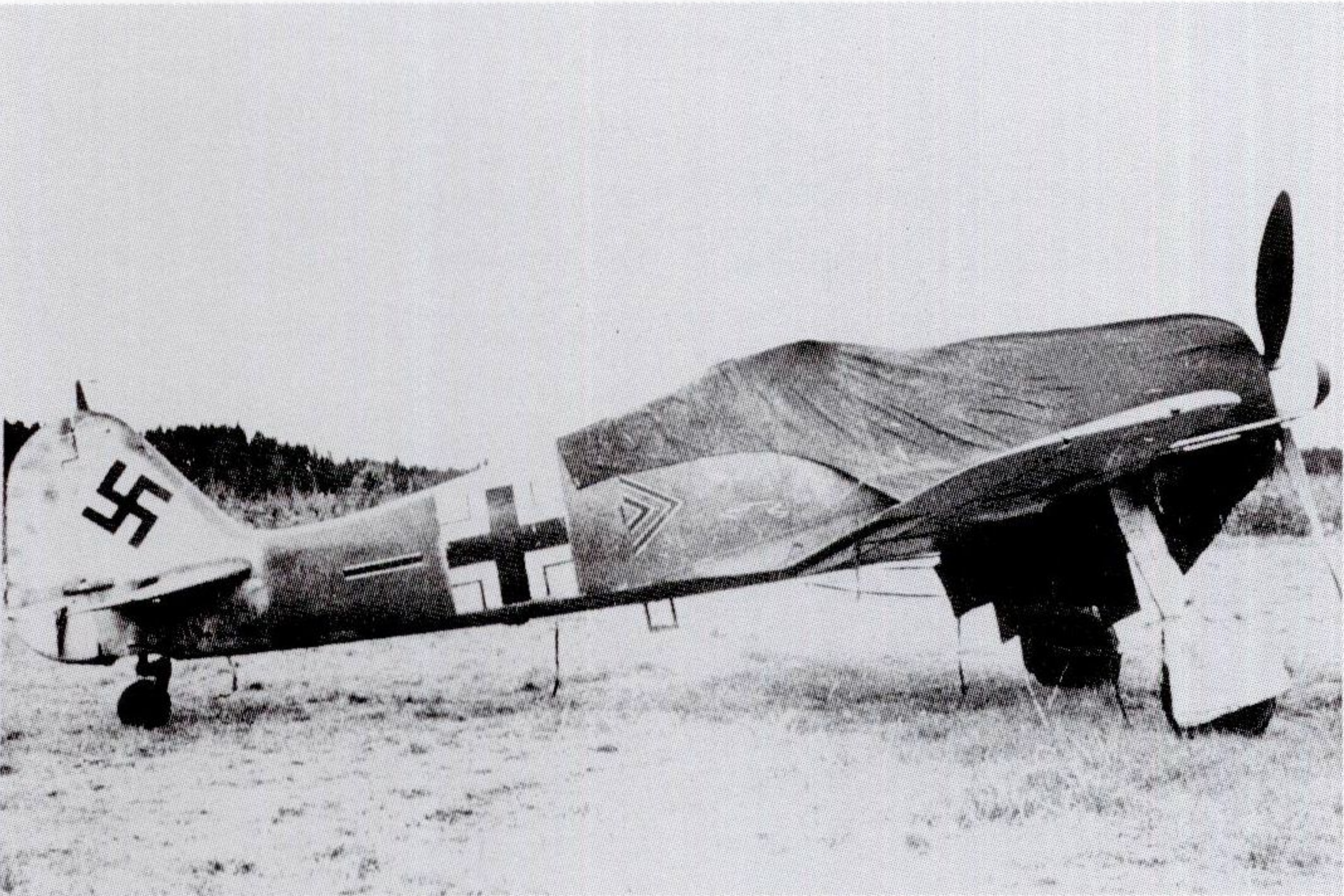


ABOVE: Winter camouflaged Bf 109 Gs of JG 5 preparing to take off from Alurkurtti, Finland, 1944.

THIS PAGE AND THE FOLLOWING TWO PAGES: On 9 June 1944, the Soviets launched an attack on both sides of Lake Ladoga, one of the aims of which was to knock Finland out of the war. The attack, which thanks to wireless intercepts, did not take the Finns completely by surprise, was strongly supported by artillery and air power and the outgunned and outnumbered Finnish troops were soon forced to retreat. The formidable Mannerheim line was breached and with Soviet forces advancing on Viipuri, the Finns called for German assistance. As well as supplying the Finns with a number of Bf 109s, the Germans organised a Gefechtsverband, or Battle Group, at Petseri in Estonia comprising 1./SG 3 with 23 Ju 87 Ds, and 4. and 5./JG 54 plus 1./SG 5 with a total of 23 Fw 190s. Later, five reconnaissance Bf 109s from NAG 1 also arrived. The battle group, which was tasked with supporting Finnish forces in their defensive battles, arrived with full technical support at Immola in Finland on 16 June. The fighters of 4. and 5./JG 54 immediately went into action against Soviet aircraft operating in support of the drive towards Viipuri which, however, fell on 20 June. Two days later, when the Soviets attacked again, strongly supported by artillery and aircraft, all formations of the battle group were in action and by the end of June their contribution in support of their Finnish allies succeeded in halting the Soviet advance. Although most units were then progressively withdrawn, with 1./SG 3 flying its last mission on 17 July, the fighter-bomber Staffel 1./SG 5 was reinforced on 3 August with the arrival of the rest of the Gruppe. The Fw 190s continued to attack ground targets until 12 August when they flew their last missions and returned to Estonia two days later. During their time in Finland, the Ju 87s and Fw 190s of Gefechtsverband Kuhlmei flew 1,242 sorties and released 577 tons of bombs, while the fighter pilots of II./JG 54 claimed 100 victories.



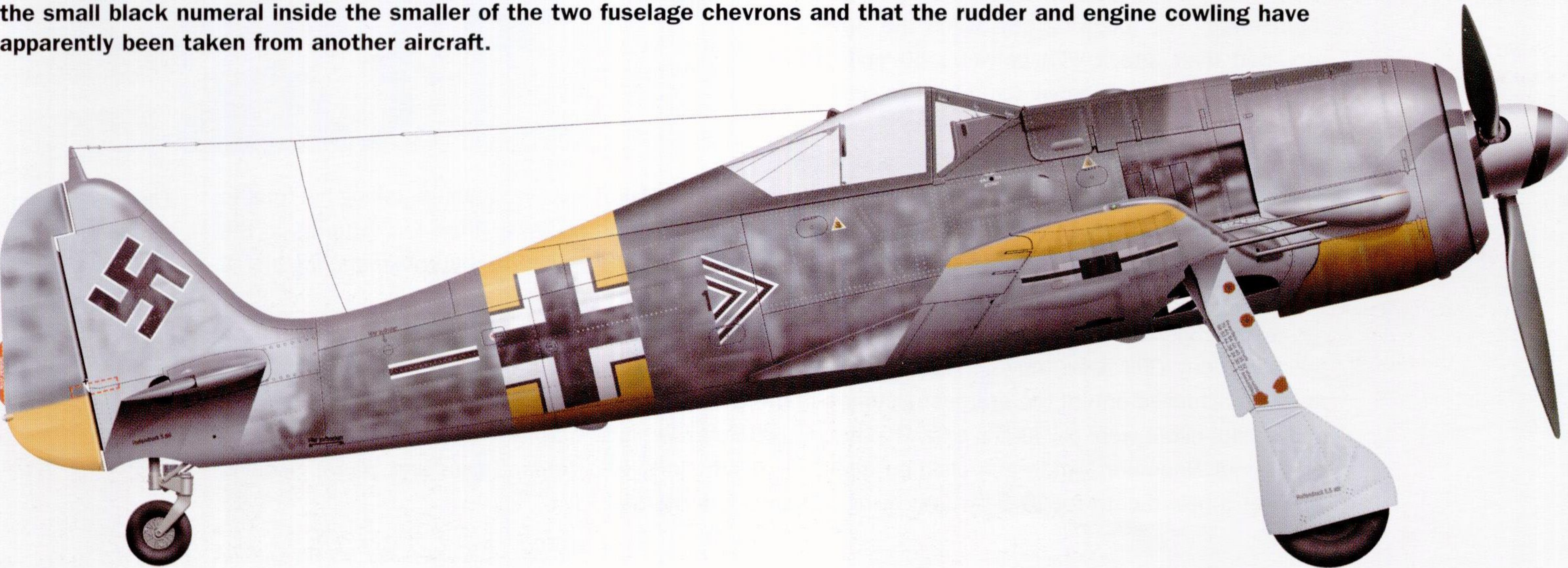
ABOVE: Major Erich Rudorffer wearing the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, awarded 11 June 1944.

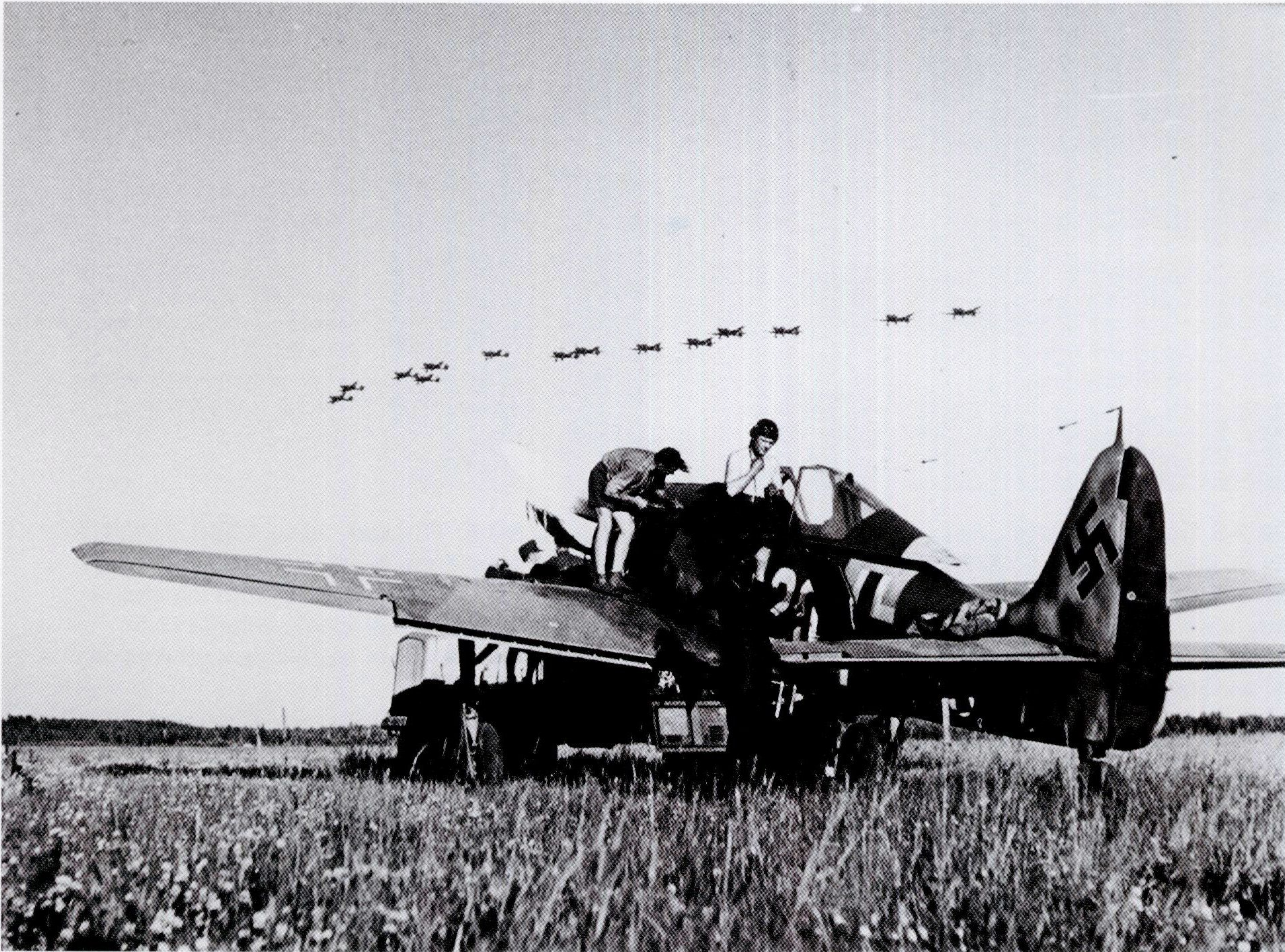


ABOVE AND RIGHT: This Fw 190 A-6, W.Nr. 550528, was flown by Major Erich Rudorffer, the Kommandeur of II./JG 54 at Immola in June 1944. The machine had previously been flown by Hptm. Horst Ademeit, Kommandeur of I./JG 54, before being passed on to II. Gruppe. Apart from the resprayed areas to either side of the fuselage Balkenkreuz, upon which was painted a double chevron and a II. Gruppe bar, the machine remained the same as when flown by Ademeit.

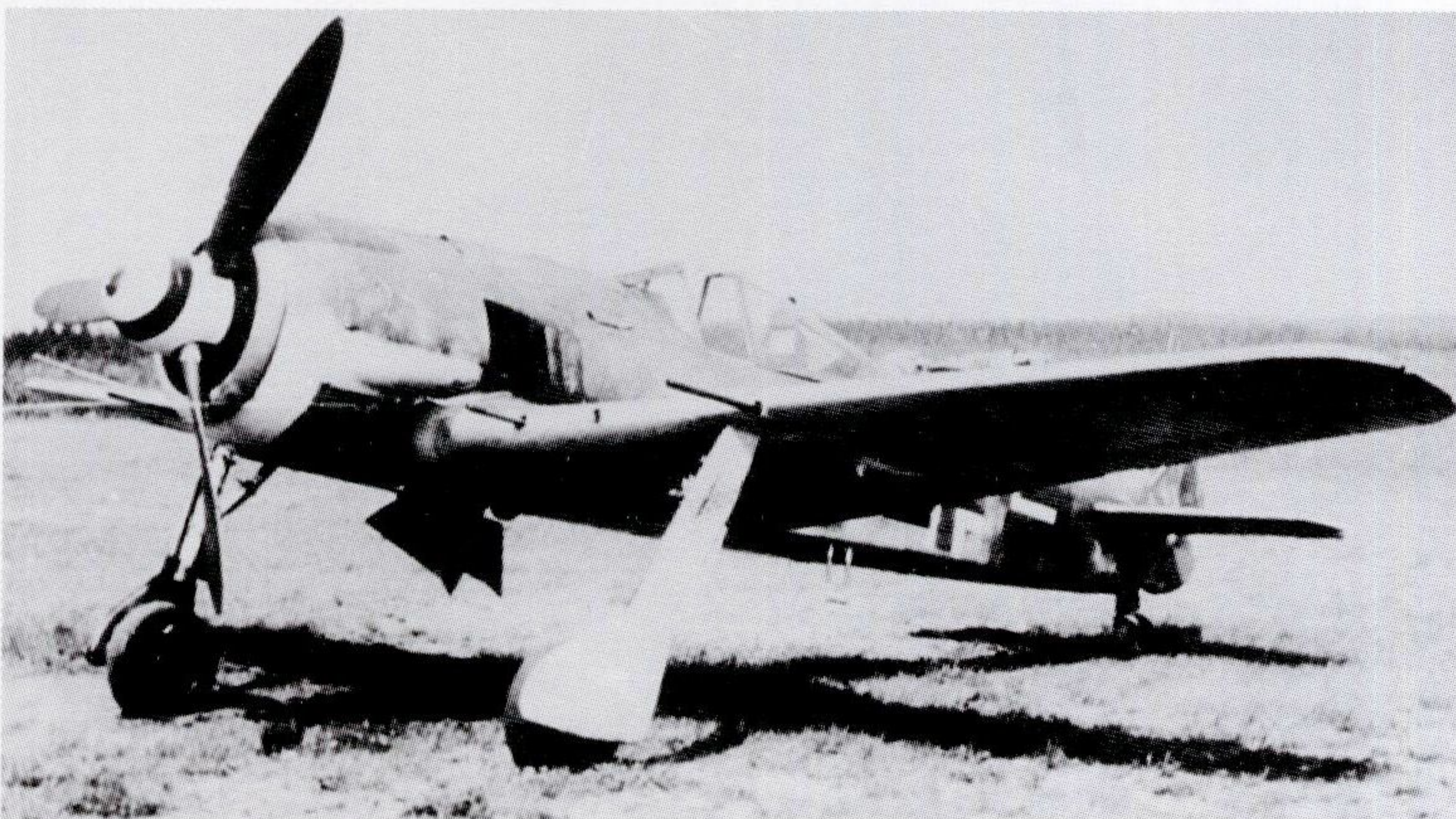
Focke-Wulf Fw 190 A-6, W.Nr. 550528, flown by Major Erich Rudorffer, the Kommandeur of II./JG 54, Immola, June 1944

Major Rudorffer's aircraft was finished in a faded 74/75/76 scheme with large areas of 75 around the fuselage Balkenkreuz resprayed in 75 where the new Kommandeur's chevrons and a Gruppe bar had been applied. The fuselage band, the panel under the nose and the underneath of the wingtips were yellow, as was the base of the rudder. Note the small black numeral inside the smaller of the two fuselage chevrons and that the rudder and engine cowling have apparently been taken from another aircraft.

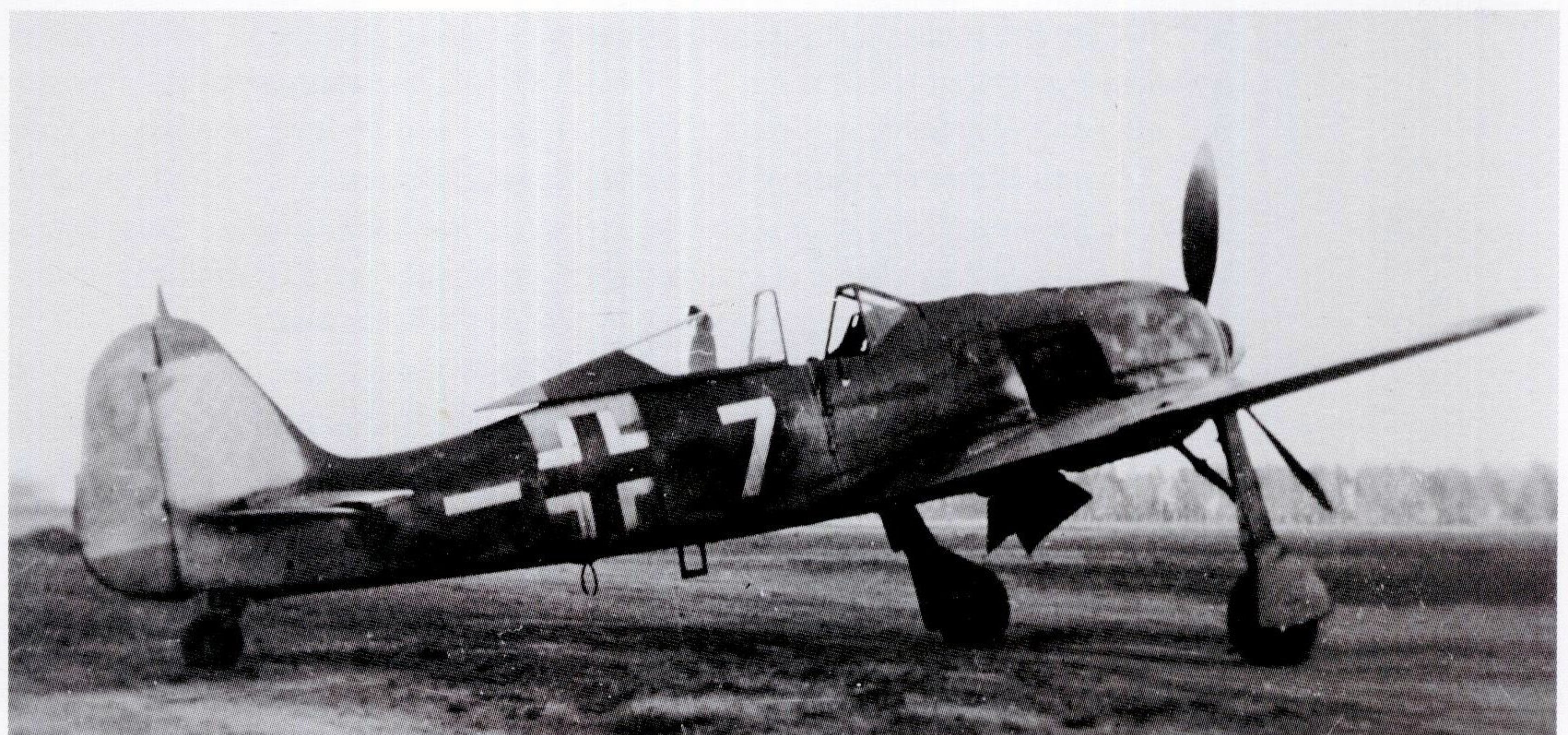


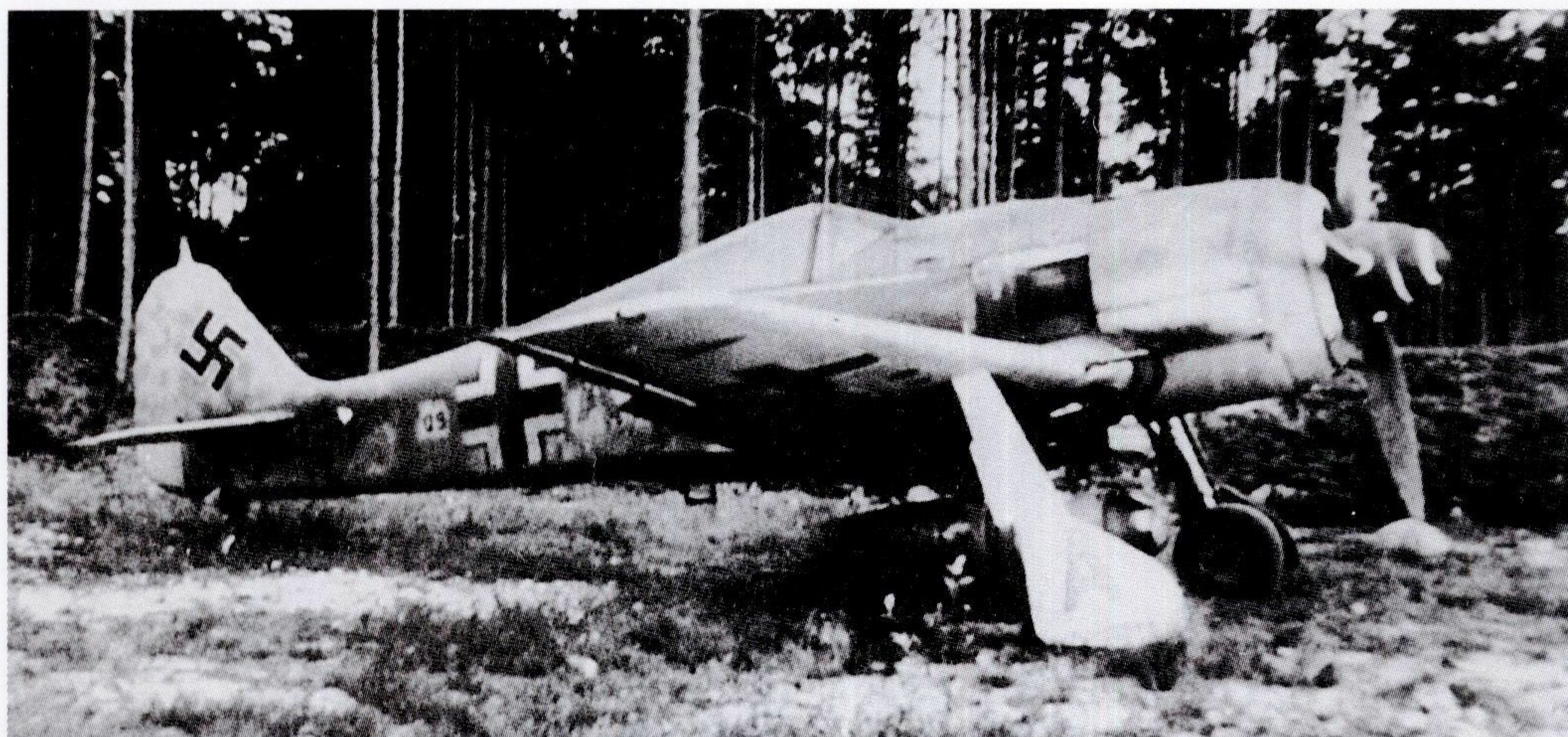


LEFT: An Fw 190 A-6 of 4./JG 54 being prepared for a mission on the morning of 2 July 1944. The formation of Ju 87 D-5s in the background belong to Lt. Herbert Schmidt's 1./SG 3 and are returning from an attack against Soviet armour at Ihantala.



ABOVE, ABOVE RIGHT AND RIGHT: Another aircraft of Gefechtsverband Kuhlmei was this Fw 190 A-6 'White 7', W.Nr. 531056, of 4./JG 54, photographed at Käkisalmi in early July. In addition to the overpainting of the yellow area at the base of the rudder and the lower part of the yellow fuselage band, some parts of the camouflage finish have also been resprayed, most noticeably on the fin and the area around the tactical number and II. Gruppe bar. The white outline swastika on the fin is unusual at this time of the war.





LEFT: This Fw 190 F-8 was flown by Hptm. Fritz Schröter, the Kommandeur of I./SG 5. Although finished in a standard 74/75/76 scheme with yellow theatre and identification markings, an interesting feature of this machine is that the fuselage is marked with a four-digit identification code, in this case Q9+AB, not normally seen on Fw 190s. Note also that the individual aircraft letter 'A' has been repeated on the wheel fairings. The fact that this aircraft carries a 300 litre drop tank suggests it may just have arrived at Salmijärvi, in Finland.

Focke-Wulf Fw 190 F-8 flown by Hptm. Fritz Schröter, Kommandeur of I./SG 5, Finland, June 1944

Hptm. Schröter's aircraft was finished in a 74/75/76 scheme with a large area of 83 around the fuselage markings. Within this area of 83 and on a background of the original finish was the '9Q' Geschwader code, approximately one-fifth the size of the remaining two letters which also appeared on a lighter background. As a Stab machine, the individual aircraft's code letter 'A' was in green 25 and the larger letters were narrowly outlined in white. Yellow panels were applied under the engine cowling and wingtips, and the aircraft also had a partial yellow rudder and fuselage band.



Operations in the far north brought particular difficulties not experienced by units operating elsewhere, and in the Polar summer, because the sun never sets, the Bf 109 fighter pilots of JG 5 were active around the clock. *Ob/t.* Dörr claimed a total of 12 victories during operations on 27 and 28 June, and *Lt.* Jakob Norz also claimed 12 victories hereby increasing his score from 91 to 103, although it should be pointed out that a substantial number of the claims attributed to JG 5's pilots in the summer of 1944 are not confirmed by Russian records. Similarly, after an air battle in the evening of 17 July 1944, when JG 5 engaged about a hundred Soviet aircraft, the German pilots claimed to have shot down 37 including seven by Schuck, five each by *Major* Ehrler and *Lt.* Norz, and four by Franz Dörr. However, during research into Soviet archives of the period, Russian historian Yuriy Rybin found loss reports for no more than five Soviet aircraft, although these examples of overclaiming are exceptional and apply only to JG 5. Generally, the victory claims submitted by pilots of other units operating elsewhere on the Eastern Front in 1944 correspond much more closely to actual Soviet losses.

Farther south on the Karelian front, the situation had meanwhile become very active. On 9 June the Soviets opened a powerful offensive against strongly fortified Finnish positions on the Karelian Isthmus north of Leningrad. To support the Finns, the Germans despatched a battle group, *Gefechtsverband Kuhlmei*, consisting of two *Schlachtgruppen*, a reconnaissance *Gruppe* and II./JG 54. The fighter pilots of II./JG 54 were able to attain quite an impressive number of victories but lost two of its best pilots. One was *Lt.* Helmut Grollmus, who was credited with six victories on 19 June, increasing his tally to 75, before being shot down and killed in a fighter versus fighter battle near Viipuri on the same day. On 21 June, *Hptm.* Herbert Aloe, with 31 victories, was shot down and posted as missing.

On 18 July the Soviets discontinued their offensive against the Finns and transferred large parts of their forces from the Finnish front to the front opposing the German *Heeresgruppe Mitte*. Shortly afterwards, *Gefechtsverband Kuhlmei* was dissolved and the units were transferred to the Baltic countries or to Germany.

On 4 September 1944, the government of Finland, which had previously been allied to Germany and whose troops had co-operated with German forces in attempts to cut the railway line to Murmansk and captured Petsamo, signed a cease-fire agreement with the Soviet Union and surrendered to the Allies on 19 September. Hitler instructed the German 20th Mountain Army to retain Petsamo and northern Finnish Lapland in Lapland.

When Finnish attempts to evict the Germans failed, the Soviet 14th Army intervened and on 7 October initiated an offensive against the German 20th Mountain Army's positions along the Litsa river. This Soviet offensive, supported by amphibious landings and 750 aircraft of the 7 VA, allowed the Soviets to seize Petsamo on 15 October. During the following weeks, as the Soviet advance continued, JG 5 provided air cover for the retreating troops and *Oblt.* Dörr, who had claimed six victories on 9 October, claimed another five on the 21st. Having succeeded Heinrich Ehrler as Kommandeur of III./JG 5, Dörr continued to lead the *Gruppe* until the end of the war, which he survived with a total of 128 victories, 91 of which were obtained in 1944. Another successful pilot operating with the *Eismeergruppe* during these months was *Lt.* Jakob Norz with 117 victories. His death on 16 September, when his Bf 109 crashed following combat with Il-2s, came as one of the unit's greatest losses of the war.

The Norwegian town of Kirkenes, which had for so long been one of the *Eismeergruppe's* main bases, was seized by the Red Army on 25 October. When the Soviet offensive halted on 29 October, by which time the German troops had been pushed out of northern Finland and northern Norway, the operation had cost the Soviets the loss of 62 aircraft between 7 and 29 October.

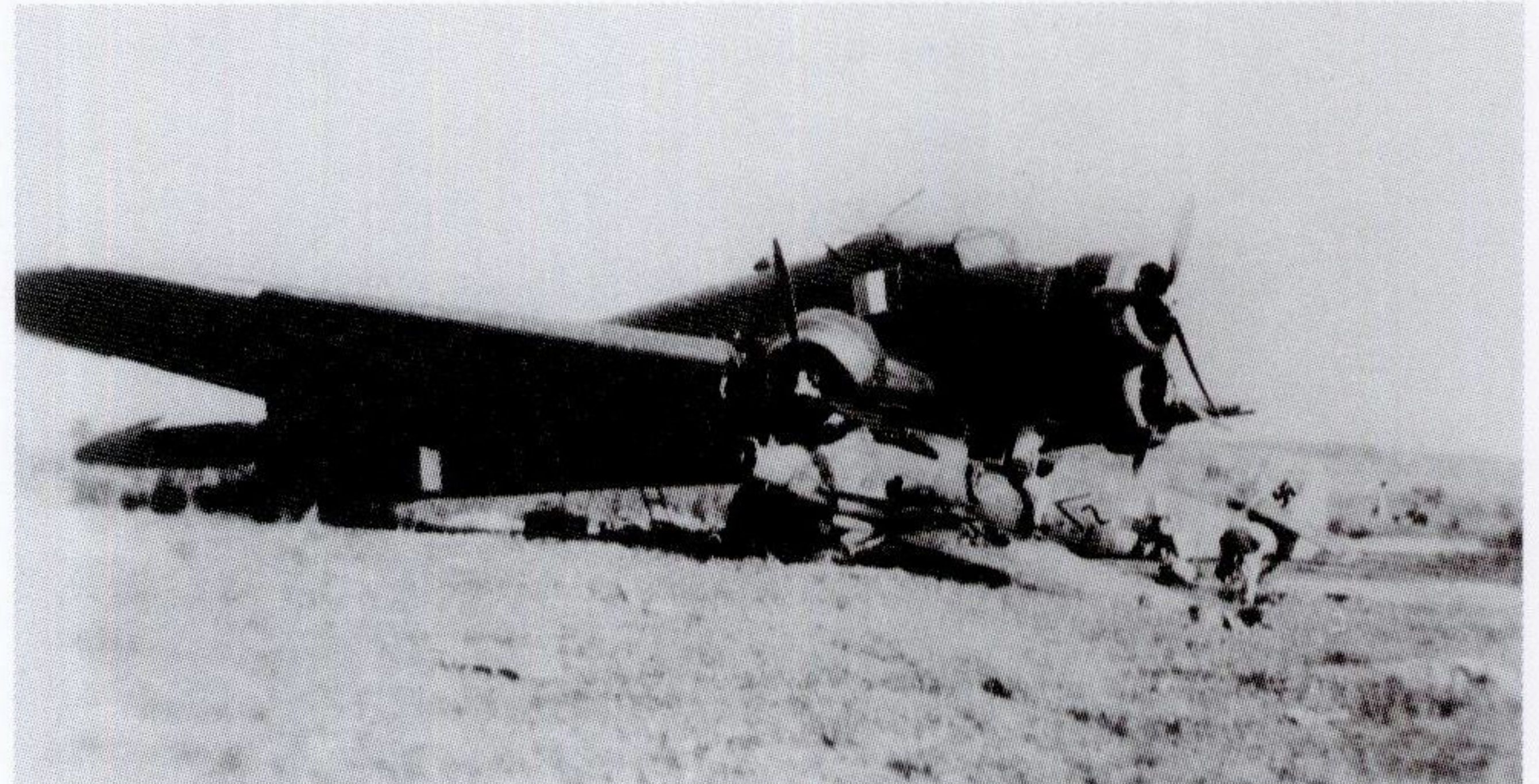
As a dark finale to the *Eismeergruppe's* successful period in the far north, RAF bombers managed to sink the German battleship *Tirpitz* in a Norwegian fjord on 12 November 1944. *Major* Heinrich Ehrler was made a scapegoat and removed from his command amid allegations that he took off only in order to achieve his 200th victory and that he failed to lead the *Geschwader* properly against the RAF bombers. He was arrested and placed in jail in Oslo. When later released, he was allowed to join JG 7.

Because Hitler feared an invasion of western Norway, the remaining months of the *Eismeergruppe's* operational history in the north consisted of providing fighter cover over the west coast of Norway and German coastal convoys. Although this activity was relatively uneventful, one of the unit's best pilots, *Lt.* Rudolf Linz, with 70 victories, was lost on 9 February 1945.

The Collapse of Army Group Centre

Contrary to popular belief, the Soviets only rarely possessed the same numerical superiority in the air as the Western Allies attained over the Normandy invasion area in the summer of 1944. In the East, the front was simply too long, but the Soviet tactic was to bolster combat spirits among its ground troops by always maintaining at least a small number of aircraft in any given sector of the front. The Soviet commanders also created strong concentrations of aircraft in particularly important sectors, but not to the same degree as the Germans. Thus, while many German ground troops felt deserted by the *Luftwaffe* because the bulk of its aircraft were concentrated in just one sector, Soviet troops could always rely on at least some degree of air support. However, during Operation '*Bagration*', the major Soviet offensive in June and July 1944 which resulted in the destruction of Army Group Centre, the Soviet commanders created a massive concentration of aircraft that vastly outnumbered those available to *Luftflotte* 6, the local air command covering the area occupied by Army Group Centre.

The forces available to the three Soviet fronts involved in '*Bagration*' amounted to a total of 1.25 million troops with over 4,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 5,327 aircraft. In addition,



ABOVE: Interesting Stab markings on a Bf 109 G which has been involved in a landing accident with a Savoia-Marchetti S. 81. The unit to which the Bf 109 belonged is not known, but the SM 81 belonged to Transportstaffel 10 which was manned by Italian personnel of the Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana who were supposedly loyal to Mussolini in German-occupied Italy. However, as a result of the poor Italian performance in the defence of their homeland when the Allies invaded Sicily, followed by their underhand dealings with the Allies in 1943 and the subsequent surrender and defection of the Italian Government in September 1943, the Germans understandably regarded Italian personnel with suspicion and tended to employ them only on transport duties well behind the front lines. Transportstaffel 10 was briefly employed in Finland in the summer of 1944.

1,007 bombers of the ADD were earmarked for the operation and the left wing of the 1st Belorussian Front – the only component to take part in ‘*Bagration*’ – included another 416,000 troops with 1,456 aircraft.

Operation ‘*Bagration*’ was preceded by a massive partisan offensive involving 10,000 separate attacks which paralysed the whole railway network in Army Group Centre’s rear. This was followed on the night of 21/22 June by massive Soviet bombing attacks directed against the German rear area. Operation ‘*Bagration*’ proper was initiated the next day, but the main attacks were launched by three Soviet Fronts, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Belorussia, on 23 June.

Luftflotte 6 began the battle with only 45 fighters and was badly hampered by lack of fuel, but on 23 June, JG 51 flew 180 sorties and attained 43 victories, 23 of which were claimed by the *Stabsstaffel*. On 24 June, when parts of the German 3rd *Panzerarmee* were surrounded at Vitebsk, JG 51’s *Oblt.* Anton Hafner, now *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 51 and the most successful pilot in *Jagdgeschwader* ‘*Mölders*’, shot down four Soviet aircraft to bring his tally to 144 victories.

The achievements of such pilots as Hafner, however, were mere pinpricks compared with the 28,000 sorties flown by the Soviets in the first four days of ‘*Bagration*’, many of which were flown in attacks aimed at disrupting the retreat of German troops. On 25 June, JG 51’s War Diary noted: “*The airfield at Orsha was subjected to a heavy raid. In spite of the fact that the enemy aircraft were expected, not one aircraft could take off.*”

Mainly as a result of Soviet air operations, the German 9th Army became enveloped at Bobruisk and 4th Army became enveloped at Minsk. On 28 June, the Stavka ordered a redirected general offensive by four fronts – the 1st Baltic, and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Belorussian.

By this time, by transferring units from France, the German fighter strength on the Eastern Front had been reinforced and the total increased to 475 aircraft. The Eastern Front thus once again became the area with the largest number of German fighters, slightly surpassing even the critical Normandy Front with 425 *Luftwaffe* fighters. This was a remarkable achievement, not least against the background of the quite heavy losses inflicted upon *Luftflotte* 6 by the VVS, which according to Soviet estimations, lost 300 aircraft between 23 June and 4 July 1944. By that time, *Heeresgruppe Mitte* had already lost 350,000 troops, and in the ensuing weeks, another 100,000 would be lost.

Of the 475 fighter aircraft on the Eastern Front, over 200 were operating under *Luftflotte* 6 to help stem Operation ‘*Bagration*’. Newly arrived units included parts of JG 52, and even III./JG 11 which arrived straight from operations over the Normandy landing area but, despite the reinforcements, *Luftflotte* 6 steadily lost aircraft and pilots. In III./JG 11, the average level of pilot experience was below that of most Eastern Front *Jagdgruppen*, and it therefore sustained some severe losses, particularly on 29 June when Soviet fighter pilots shot down eight of its Fw 190s. In July, overall fighter losses increased sharply. On 6 July, I./JG 51’s *Kommandeur*, Knight’s Cross holder *Major* Erich Leie, was shot down by Soviet fighters and was lucky to survive. On the 7th, 3./JG 51’s *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Wever, was shot down and injured and on 9 July, II./JG 52’s *Lt.* Otto Fönnekold, an experienced pilot with around 120 victories, was shot down and injured by Soviet fighters. IV./JG 51, recently equipped with new Fw 190 A-8s, lost four aircraft in combat on 9 July.

The situation grew worse from 13 July when the Soviet 1st Ukrainian Front began its so-called Lvov-Sandomierz offensive against German Army Group North Ukraine, south of the Pripet Marshes. This offensive was supported by a significantly reinforced 2 VA with no fewer than 3,000 aircraft, and *Luftwaffe* forces tasked to counter this offensive immediately found themselves in great difficulty with 2 VA’s fighter pilots claiming to have shot down 115 German aircraft during the first four days of the offensive alone.

Among these was *Hptm.* Edwin Thiel of *Stab*/JG 51, a *Ritterkreuzträger* with 76 victories, who was shot down and killed during a low-level attack against a Soviet troop column on 14 July. Another *Experte*, *Lt.* Walter Wolfrum of I./JG 52 with 126 victories, accounted for ten Soviet fighters on 16 July before being himself shot down, but survived with injuries. Shortly afterwards, this 21-year old pilot was awarded the Knight’s Cross. The *Staffelkapitän* of 10./JG 51, *Oblt.* Venth, was shot down and killed on 17 July, and on the 18th, JG 52 sustained eight combat losses over south-eastern Poland against seven victories claimed. That day too, III./JG 11 lost *Ofw.* Siegfried Zick, one of its few experienced pilots with 31 victories, when he was shot down and badly wounded by a Soviet fighter.

BELOW: Günther Josten scored his first victory on 23 February 1943 but by 5 February 1944, when as an *Oberfeldwebel* he received the *Ritterkreuz*, he had already increased his tally to 83 Soviet aircraft. In July 1944 he became *Staffelkapitän* of 3./JG 51 and on 24 July shot down an Il-2 as his 100th victory. As an *Oberleutnant*, he was awarded the Oak Leaves on 28 March 1945, by which time he had 161 victories, and finished the war as *Kommandeur* of IV./JG 51 with 178 victories. In three and a half years flying, he was never once shot down himself.



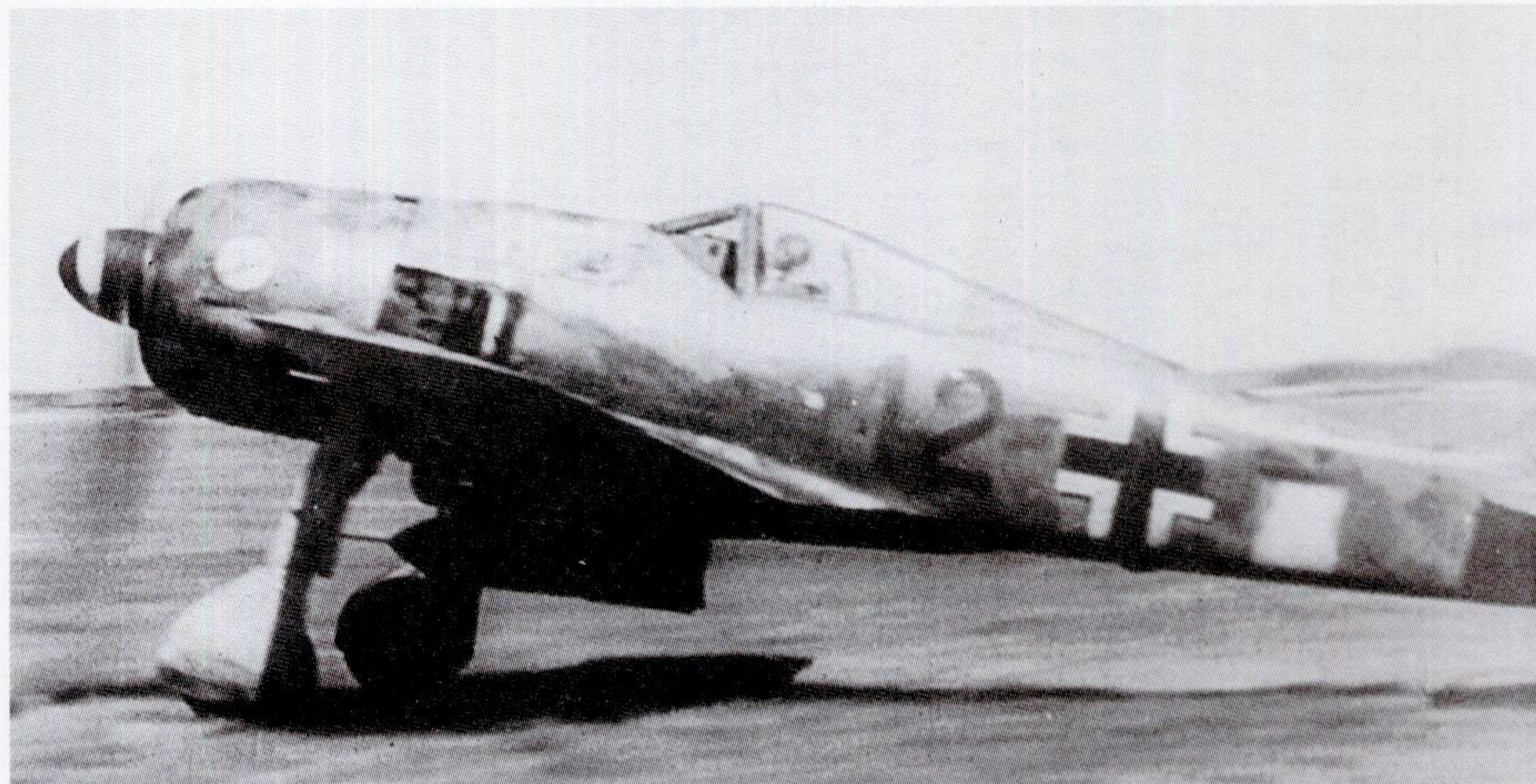
According to a Soviet analysis, the *Luftwaffe*'s overall losses compelled its fighter units to restrict their activities so that they flew only in pairs or flights and no longer in large groups. Nevertheless, the *Jagdwaaffe* fought desperately to relieve the ground troops and on the 1st Ukrainian Front, units from four *Jagdgeschwader* – JG 11, JG 51, JG 52, and JG 54 – were concentrated against 2 VA. *Oblt.* Günther Josten, *Staffelkapitän* of 3./JG 51, scored his 100th victory by bringing down an Il-2 in the Rava-Ruska area on 20 July. IV./JG 54's *Oblt.* Sigurd Haala shot down five of 2 VA's Yak-9s on 21 July and on 24 July, I./JG 52's *Gruppenkommandeur*, Major Adolf Borchers, scored his 100th victory. JG 51's top-scorer, *Oblt.* Anton Hafner, back in action after the injuries he had sustained four weeks earlier, was shot down again on the 24th. He came down in Soviet controlled territory but evaded capture and succeeded in reaching the German lines several days later.

Among the units encountered by *Jagdwaaffe* pilots during the Lvov-Sandomierz offensive was 9 GIAD, commanded by the legendary Polkovnik Aleksandr Pokryshkin. Although it flew Airacobras against the far superior Bf 109 G-6s and Fw 190s, this unit attained 28 victories during a four-day battle over the River San bridges in the period 23 to 26 July. On the 26th the Soviets brought forward reinforcements to the San River area, which further increased the *Luftwaffe* losses in this sector and 2 VA claimed to have destroyed a total of approximately 350 German aircraft between 13 and 27 July. Despite substantial reinforcements, the *Luftwaffe*'s strength on the Eastern Front dropped from over 2,000 aircraft in June 1944 to 1,760 by the end of July. By that time, the combined strength of I., III. and IV./JG 51 had been reduced to a mere 19 serviceable fighters.

The German Army was now in full retreat across the whole area. To the north, the Soviet 1st Baltic Front reached the Gulf of Riga at Tuckum on 27 July, and thus isolated *Heeresgruppe Nord* in Estonia. On the southern flank, the 1st Ukrainian Front established a bridgehead west of the Vistula River and seized Lvov on 29 July. To the Germans it seemed as if nothing could ever stop the Soviet advance, but in fact, its rapid advance had outstripped its supply lines which became so extended that the spearheads ran short of fuel and ammunition and were brought to a halt.

On 3 August, the 1st Belorussian Front was halted at Radzymin, less than 20 miles from Warsaw. A German counter-attack succeeded in destroying a Soviet tank corps. Unaware of this German defensive success, the Polish resistance rose against the German occupiers in Warsaw.

BELOW: Lt. Herbert Bareuther of 3./JG 51, second from right, examining a shot down Soviet LaGG-7. Bareuther joined 3./JG 51 as an Unteroffizier in the spring of 1941 and was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 5 February 1944 when he had 29 victories. He was promoted to Leutnant in the summer of 1944 but was shot down and wounded over Warsaw during the uprising in August. He then became a prisoner of the Polish Home Army which, in anticipation of the arrival of the Soviet Army, had risen up against the Germans. After bitter street fighting, the insurrection was crushed and Bareuther was freed by German troops. Returning to combat in February 1945 with IV./JG 3, he had 55 victories when he was killed when his aircraft crashed after being hit by anti-aircraft fire on 30 April. He was posthumously awarded the Ritterkreuz just a few days before the end of the war.



ABOVE: Due to the strength of Allied aerial opposition in Italy and over the Invasion Front, all Gruppen of Major Gerhard Weyert's SG 4 were unable to operate in these theatres without suffering high losses and the Geschwader was eventually withdrawn for employment on the Eastern Front. Except for a brief period of operations between October 1944 and early 1945, when the unit was employed during the Ardennes offensive and Operation 'Bodenplatte' in the West, SG 4 then remained in the East and at the end of the war was operating as part of VIII. Fliegerkorps under Luftflottenkommando 6. This photograph is a still from a wartime film taken in Lithuania in late July 1944, soon after the unit had arrived in the East, and shows an Fw 190 F-8 of I./SG 4, still with Mediterranean camouflage, taking off on a ground-attack mission. I./SG 4 was led at this time by Major Werner Dörnbrack who later became Kommodore. At the end of the war, SG 4 was in Czechoslovakia where, after destroying the remaining aircraft on Hradec Králové airfield, Major Dörnbrack led his men to the Americans and surrendered to US forces on 9 May 1945. Six days later, the personnel of SG 4 were handed over to the Soviets but Dörnbrack managed to escape and return to the West.





ABOVE: On 4 February 1944, Hptm. Horst Ademeit succeeded Hptm. Walter Nowotny as Kommandeur of I./JG 54 and led the Gruppe until 7 August 1944. On that date, Ademeit engaged some Soviet Il-2s and was last seen by his wingman, Gefr. Biebrichter, pursuing an Il-2 into a dense cloud of smoke rising from a fire on the ground. It is thought that Ademeit's Fw 190 was then damaged by machine gun fire from the ground, for a few minutes later the machine crashed, killing the pilot on impact. Ademeit, who had been awarded the Oak Leaves on 2 March 1944, was credited with a total of 166 aerial victories attained in more than 600 combat missions. On the day Ademeit was killed, he was flying an A-5, W.Nr. 155960, rather than his own machine, an A-6, W.Nr. 550528, seen in the background to this photograph. After Ademeit's death, the machine was passed to II./JG 54 and was flown by the Kommandeur of that Gruppe, Major Erich Rudorffer.

Meanwhile, the continued large-scale air battles led to more bitter losses on both sides. At 14.45 hrs on 7 August, Hptm. Horst Ademeit, acting Geschwaderkommodore of JG 54, took off to lead four Fw 190s on a *freie Jagd* in the Krustpils area of the Riga sector. At 15.17 hrs, they intercepted ten Il-2s and Yak-9s. Three minutes later, Ademeit attacked an Il-2 from astern without being able to score any result. He was next seen giving chase to another Il-2 and the last thing his wingman, Gefr. Biebrichter, saw was the Il-2 and Ademeit's Fw 190 A-5 disappearing into a thick cloud of smoke from a fire on the ground. A few minutes later, the Fw 190, evidently damaged by machine-gun bullets from the ground, crashed. Horst Ademeit, credited with a total of 166 aerial victories attained in more than 600 combat missions, was killed on impact.

On 10 August, a day after he had attained his 50th victory, Ofw. Fritz Lüddecke of Stab/JG 51 was shot down and killed. On the 13th, III./JG 51's Hptm. Günther Schack attained his 150th victory by shooting down an Il-2 over the border area between East Prussia and the USSR, and on the 15th, Stab/JG 54 lost Lt. Günther Haller when his Fw 190 A-5, 'Chevron 13', was shot down near Riga. Haller, who was credited with 30 victories, died of his wounds two days later. On 16 August, 3. Panzerarmee launched a counter-attack in Lithuania which resulted in the re-capture of the rail junction at Siauliai. Farther north, on 20 August, other forces of the 3. Panzerarmee established a narrow 20-mile corridor to the surrounded Heeresgruppe Nord at Riga. In Lithuania, IV./JG 54's Oblt. Sigurd Haala, credited with 40 victories, was shot down and captured on 21 August, while I./JG 54's Lt. Otto Kittel attained his 200th victory on 23 August. The same Gruppe's Knight's Cross holder Ofw. Wilhelm Philipp, then with 77 victories, was shot down and injured by an Airacobra on 28 August.

On the southern flank of this extended Soviet offensive, the 1st Ukrainian Front's advance toward Krakow in southern Poland was halted. During fierce air fighting in this sector on 17 August, Hptm. Willi Batz, commanding III./JG 52, brought his victory total past the 200-mark by shooting down six Soviet aircraft. On 22 August he followed up this success by downing another six Soviet aircraft to bring his total to 208. On 23 August, 9. Karayastaffel/JG 52's commander, Oblt. Erich Hartmann, ran up his total score to 290 by shooting down eight Soviet aircraft on three missions. The next day Hartmann flew two missions and claimed no fewer than 11 which

again raised his total to 301 and made him the first fighter pilot to exceed 300 victories. On 25 August, Hartmann was awarded the Diamonds to the Oak Leaves with Swords, the 18th serviceman to be so highly awarded, and the second in the Karayastaffel after Hermann Graf.

I./JG 52 also was highly successful during the air engagements which took place in the same sector in late August and early September. On 26 August, Lt. Franz Schall attained 11 and Lt. Anton Resch attained seven victories. Schall and Resch followed up their successes by respectively claiming another 13 and seven on the 31st, thus giving Schall a total score of 109 victories and Resch 58. In fact, during the short period from 22 August to 3 September, Schall accounted for a total of 41 enemy aircraft, a feat for which he was awarded the Knight's Cross. At 09.36 hrs on 2 September, Hptm. Adolf Borchers, the Gruppenkommandeur of I./JG 52, took off with

RIGHT: Lt. Otto Kittel (centre) of 3./JG 54 at Riga on 16 August 1944, the day that seven pilots from the Staffel claimed to have shot down 12 Il-2s. At that time, Kittel, who did not claim on the 16th, had 196 victories, but on the 26th claimed a Yak-9 and an La-5 to bring his tally to 200.



ABOVE: Also lost on 7 August 1944 was Fw. Herbert Bachnick of 9./JG 52, seen here in the cockpit of his Bf 109 G. This pilot first joined the Staffel in December 1942 and distinguished himself on a number of occasions by claiming multiple victories. Indeed, he gained his first three victories on 5 July 1943 and by the end of the year had 43. On 7 January 1944, he claimed five Il-2s, claimed four victories on 12 March, five on 13 March and another five on the 19th. With 79 victories, 41 of which were Il-2s, he was then posted to 2./JGr. Ost as an instructor for three months, being promoted to Leutnant in May. Returning to 9./JG 52, Bachnick took off on 7 August 1944 to engage US bombers and shot down a P-51 escort fighter as his 80th victory. However, his aircraft is presumed to have received damage in this action since he was obliged to make a forced landing, during which he lost control of his machine and crashed with fatal results into a railway embankment near Myslowitz in Upper Silesia. Decorations included the German Cross in Gold, awarded on 5 February 1944, and the Ritterkreuz on 27 July 1944.



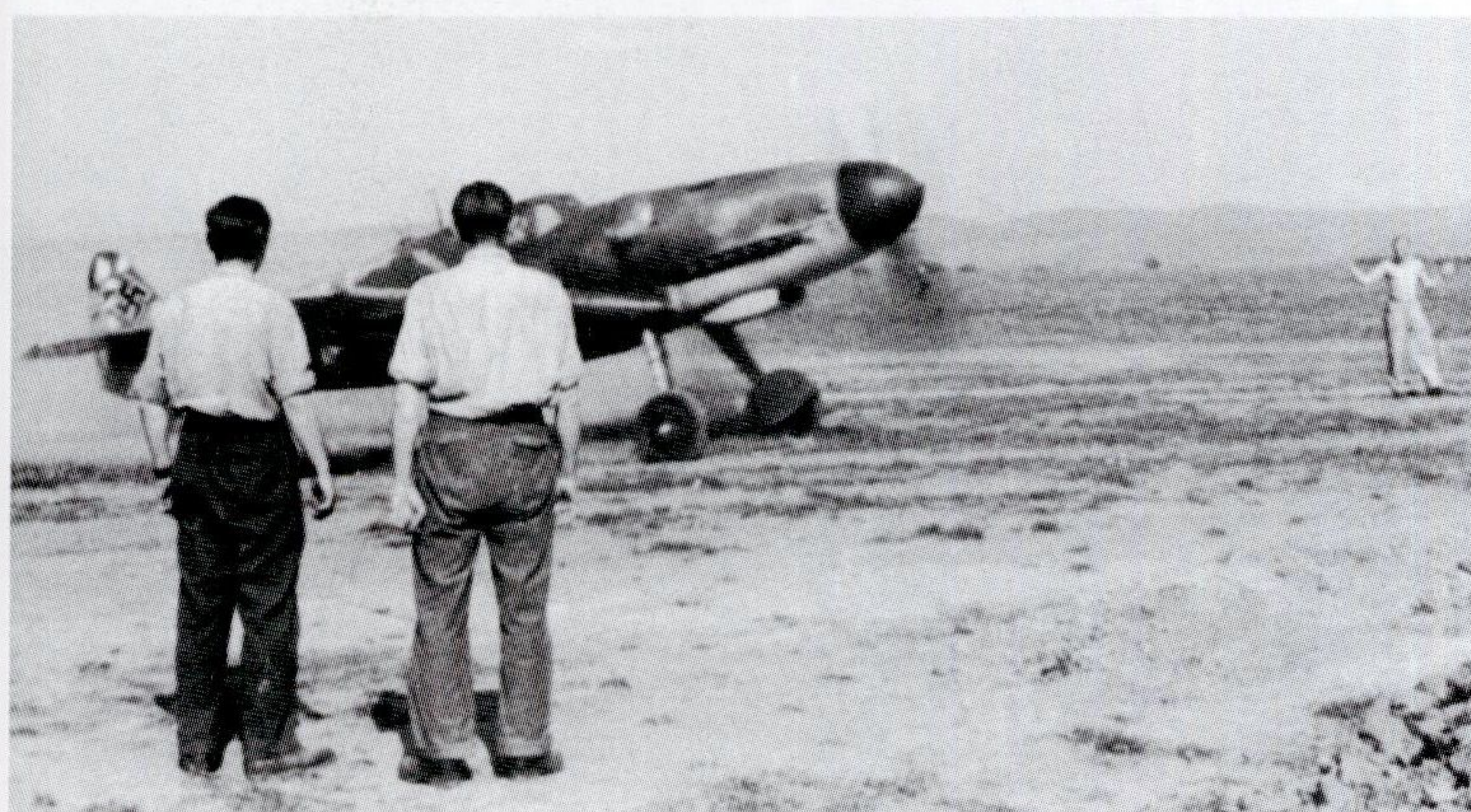


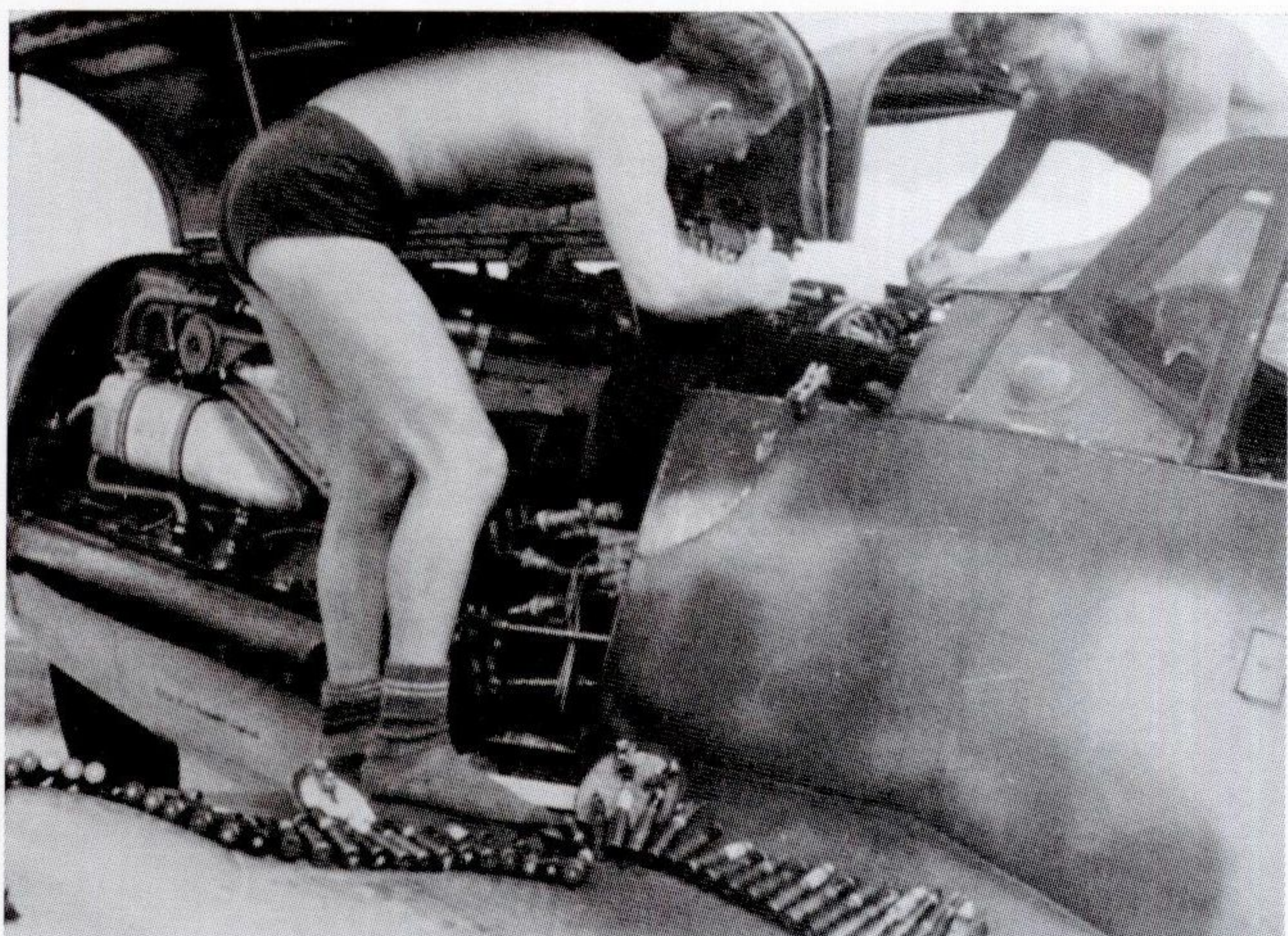
LEFT: Lt. Karl Bytowski of 3./JG 54, shown here, left, with Lt. Otto Kittel in August 1944, had a lucky escape on 14 September when his aircraft struck the ground during combat with four Yak-9s. He managed to climb to a safe altitude but could not make his home base and baled out unhurt.



RIGHT: Ofw. Wilhelm Phillip, a Knight's Cross holder of I./JG 54 with 77 victories, was shot down and wounded by a P-39 on 28 August 1944.

RIGHT, BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT: On 24 August 1944, Oblt. Erich Hartmann flew two missions and claimed a total of 11 aircraft destroyed which brought his tally to 301 and made him the first pilot to exceed 300 victories. The photograph (*RIGHT*) shows Hartmann's Bf 109 returning to its airfield and (*BELOW*) taxiing into its dispersal where (*BELOW RIGHT*) Hartmann was greeted by his colleagues who had prepared a wreath and ribbons, the latter made from toilet paper. Hartmann was awarded the Diamonds the next day.





ABOVE: Armourers of JG 52 rearming the MG 131 machine guns in one of Erich Hartmann's Bf 109 G-6s.

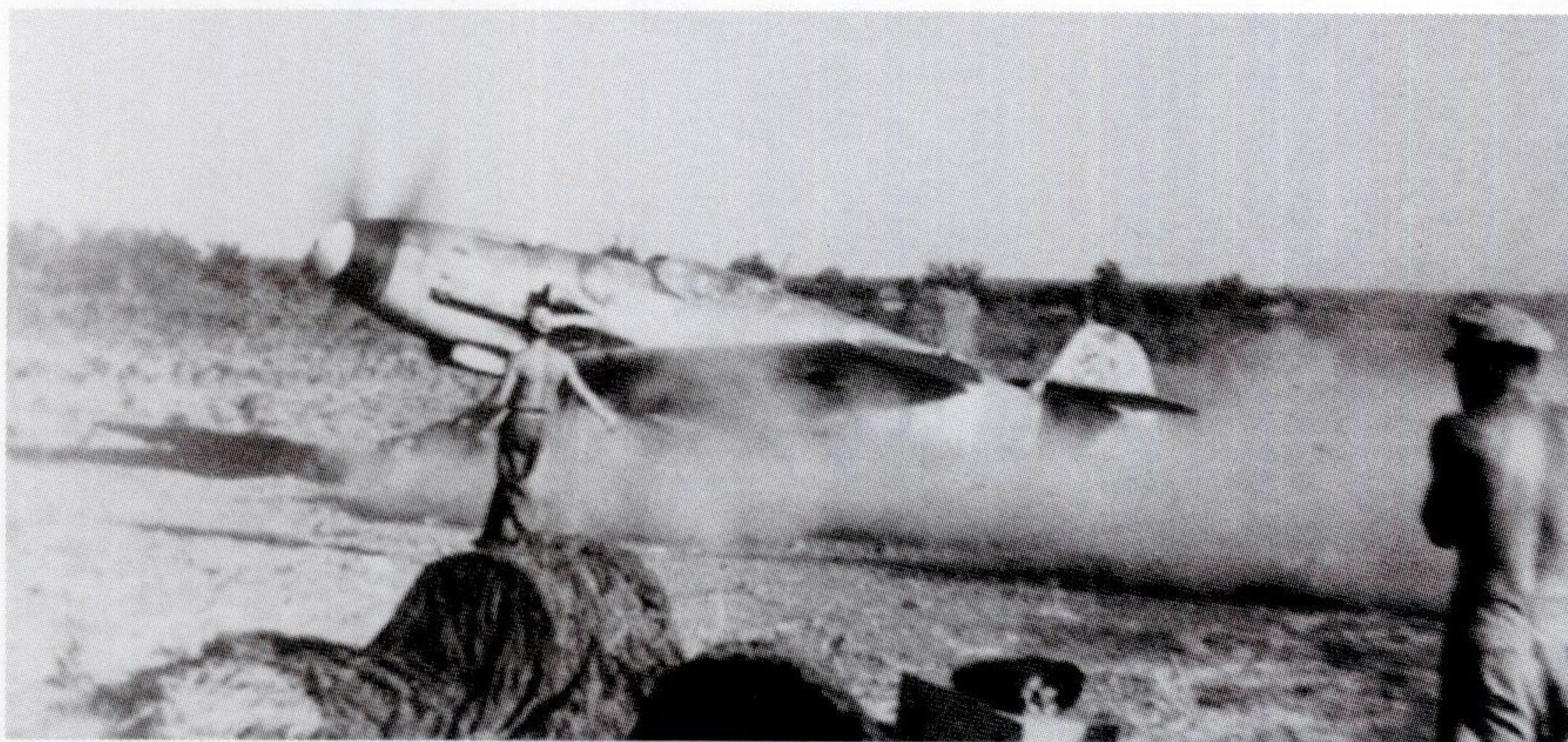
his *Schwarm* from Mzurowa aerodrome and engaged a formation of Il-2s under fighter escort. Five Il-2s, two Yak-9s, and two Airacobras were claimed, and two of these were credited to *Hptm.* Borchers as his 116th and 117th victories. Six hours later, Borchers engaged another formation of Soviet aircraft together with his wingman, *Fw.* Nehring. When one of the Soviet aircraft crashed into the ground at 15.32 hrs, Borchers had attained his 118th victory and JG 52's 10,000th.

The great summer battle which extended from the region immediately to the south of the Pripet Marshes to the Baltic coast resulted in very high losses on both sides. The Soviets

lost well over 1,000 aircraft from 22 June to the end of August 1944, while between 22 June and late August 1944, JG 51 sustained 57 pilot casualties. III./JG 11, which had been brought in from the Western Front, sustained 23 pilot casualties on the Eastern Front between late June and the end of August 1944. In comparison, this *Geschwader's* II. *Gruppe*, which remained in the West, sustained the same number of casualties while operating against the USAAF and RAF in the same period. In early September 1944, the badly depleted III./JG 11 was withdrawn from first-line service and its surviving pilots were given a period of rest in Germany while the gaps from the losses were filled by inexperienced replacements.

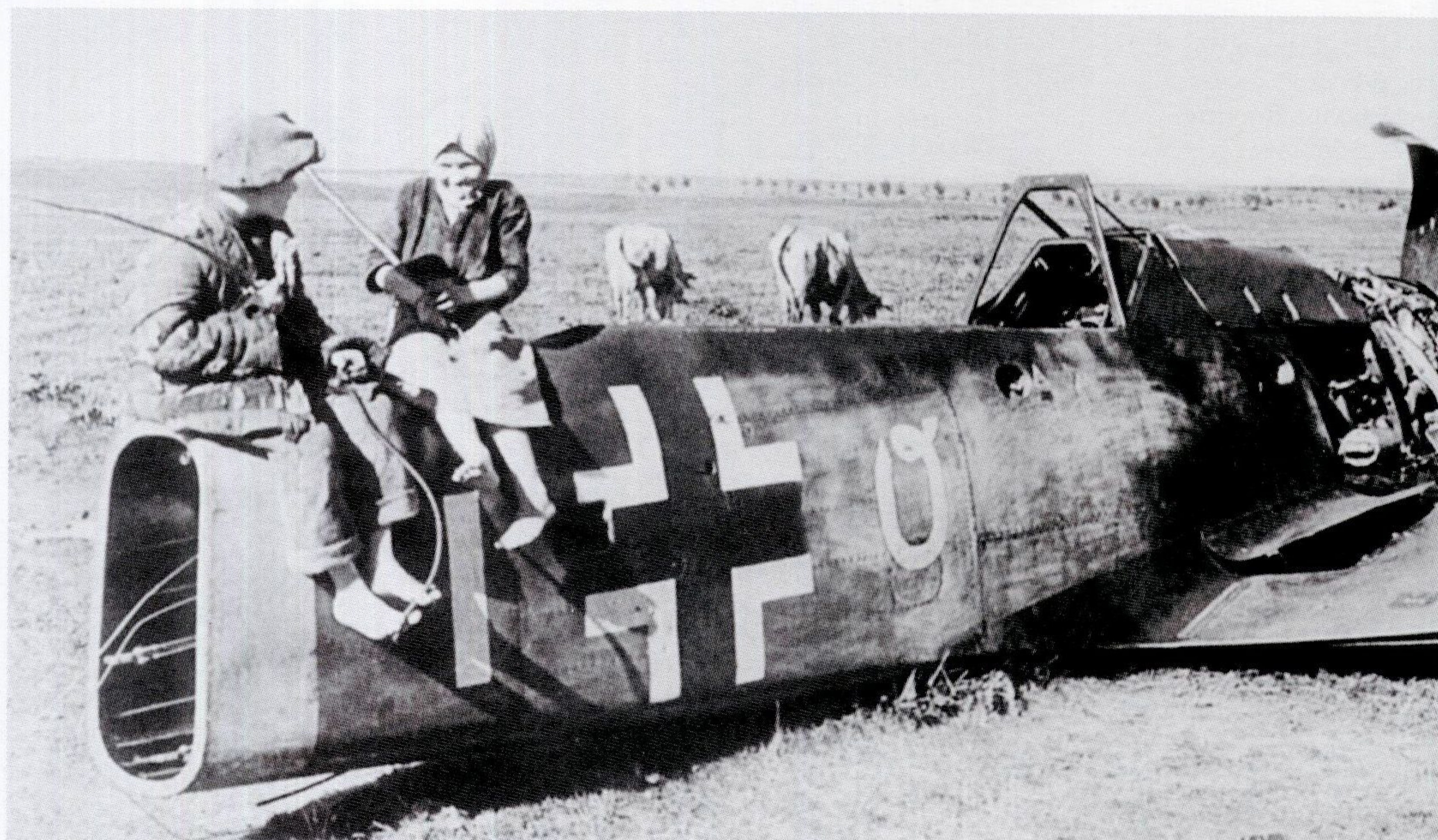


ABOVE: Erich Hartmann wearing the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds.



ABOVE: One important reason for the Soviet Army's huge success in Operation 'Bagration' was a lack of adequate German aerial reconnaissance. Although the increasing danger from Soviet fighters had already resulted in most Luftwaffe *Nahaufklärungsgruppen* exchanging their Fw 189s for Bf 109s, the reconnaissance fliers of Luftflotte 6 operated, as one pilot put it, 'like hunted hares', a reflection of the *Jagdgruppen's* inability to provide such vital missions with effective fighter cover. This photograph was actually taken in another theatre, but the scene is typical of central Russia in the summer of 1944.

Operation 'Bagration' resulted in the collapse of Army Group Centre and catastrophic German losses. In two months, the Soviet armies had advanced 450 miles and claimed to have captured 158,000 troops, killed almost 400,000 more, and captured or destroyed 2,000 tanks, 10,000 guns and 57,000 motor vehicles. 'Bagration' was the most impressive Soviet victory of the Second World War and, at the same time, the worst defeat ever suffered by the German Army.



RIGHT: Russian children playing on the remains of an Fw 190 which had flown with the III. *Gruppe* of an unknown *Schlachtgeschwader* in 1944. The highly individual style of the tactical code letter 'Yellow O' is interesting.

The Late-War Camouflage Colours

'I could already see the little blue flames of the exhausts, the oxide trail left by the burning gases along his fuselage, his emerald green back and his pale blue belly...'

Pierre Clostermann describing an Fw 190 D-9 in his book, 'The Big Show'

From the spring of 1941 to the summer of 1944, the *Luftwaffe's* standard camouflage finish for day fighters operating over Europe was a grey scheme in 74, 75 and 76. On the upper surfaces of the wings, tailplane and top of the fuselage, 74 and 75 were applied in a segmented pattern, while the undersurfaces were in 76. On the fuselage sides and over the vertical tail surfaces were mottles in varying density of 74, 75 and 02 over the undersurface colour 76..

Although this grey scheme satisfied most requirements, a number of units had discovered that a green scheme, sometimes with added areas of brown, was better suited to their operational environment and, after applying their own finishes, requested that factories supply replacement aircraft already camouflaged in the preferred colours. Some good examples of this practice may be seen on the Bf 109 Fs and Gs operated by JG 51, JG 54 and JG 77 in Russia and also on the Fw 190s later flown by JG 51 and JG 54 ¹.

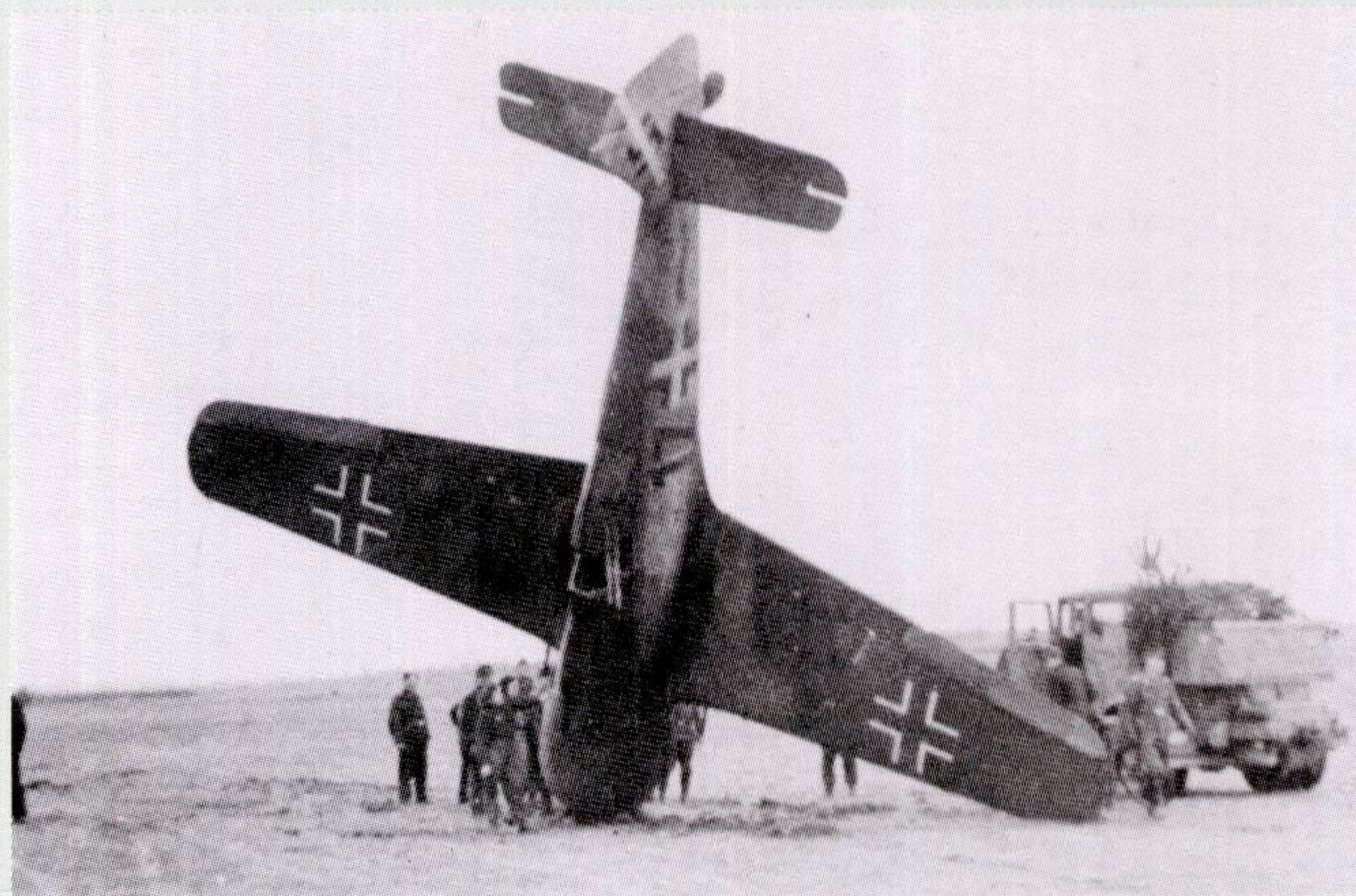
From the spring of 1943 onwards and beginning in Sicily, the air war began to turn against the *Luftwaffe* and, as the Allies increasingly gained air superiority, so the general requirement concerning aircraft camouflage changed to a scheme which would help conceal aircraft when they were on the ground rather than when they were in the air.

In response to this requirement, the RLM attempted to provide a new standard scheme which would not only eliminate the various specially requested schemes and provide a finish better suited to the changing situation at the fronts but, moreover, would enable paint manufacturers to introduce some economies in the required raw materials, some of which were already becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. All surviving evidence of such a change seems to indicate that it was first considered as early as August 1943 and documents seem to suggest that camouflage colours for all categories of aircraft would be revised ². In particular, it was intended to remove RLM 65, 71, and 74 as camouflage colours, together with RLM 70 which was to be used only on spinners and metal propeller blades, and introduce three new colours, all various greens, designated RLM 81, 82 and 83. These new colours, together with the retained 75 and 76, would then provide a range of colours suitable for all bomber, transport and – although not specifically stated – fighter and fighter-bomber aircraft.

While bombers and transports were to be painted in an 81/82/76 scheme, it seems that fighter and fighter-bomber aircraft – possibly because certain front-line units already preferred green in the upper surface scheme – were to have one of the existing greys replaced with a contrasting dark green. This was achieved by withdrawing grey 74 and replacing it with the new 83 so that the upper surface colours became green 83 and grey 75 ³, although the precise date when these new colours should have been introduced is not known.

Naturally, while the RLM was anxious to convert the aircraft industry to the new colours as soon as practicable, it was equally concerned that, rather than waste existing stocks of the old paints, these were to be consumed with the exception of 74 which, theoretically, was to be completely withdrawn. Constructors were therefore informed that any stocks of the old colours could be used with the new ones and, consequently, fighter aircraft were sometimes finished in various combinations of 75, 81, 82 and 83.

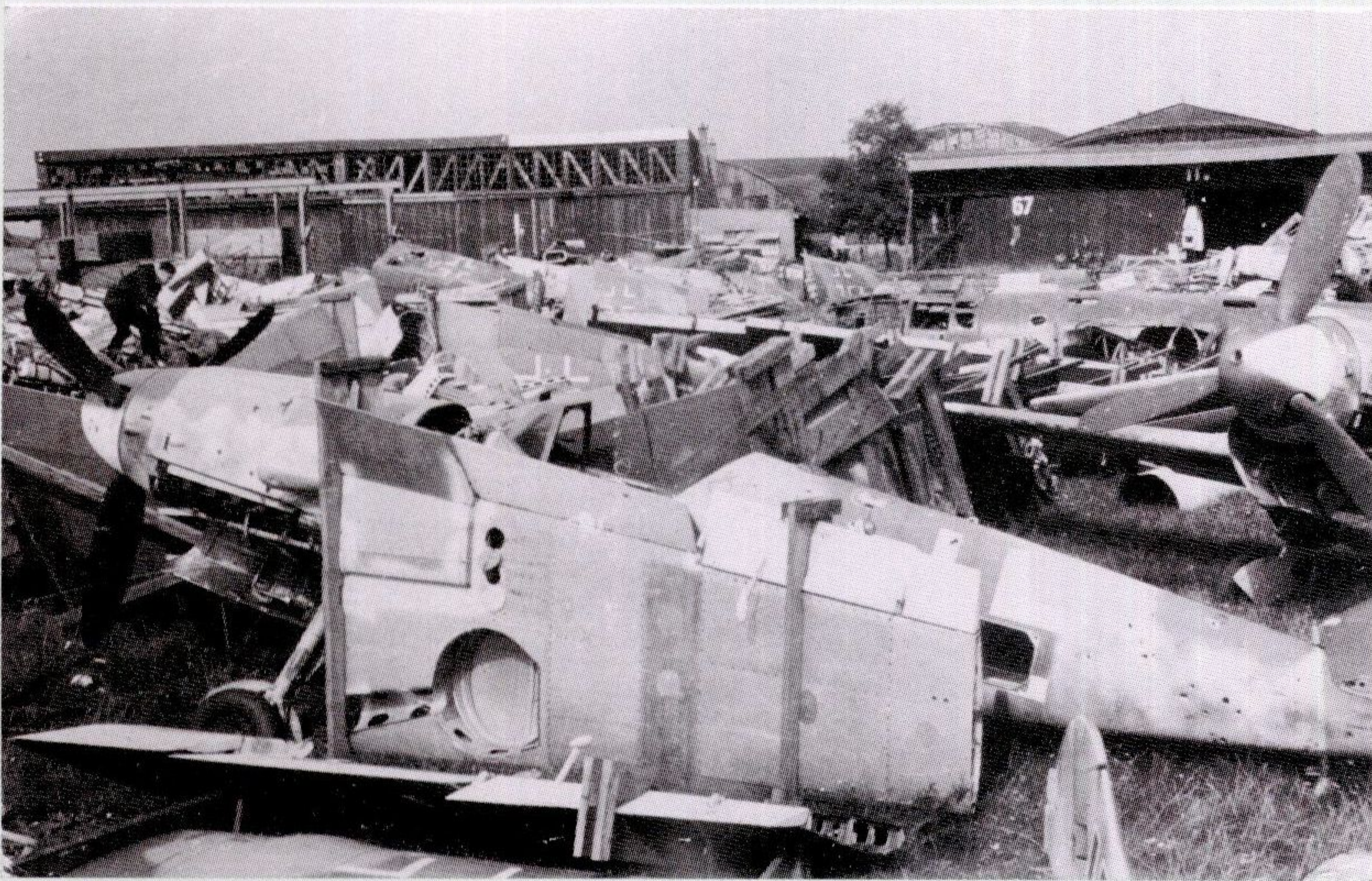
By 1944, because of the Allied attacks on Germany itself and the losses on the various battlefronts, the overwhelming requirement was for more fighters. To fully co-ordinate industry and increase fighter production as rapidly as possible, on 1 March a *Jägerstab* was established with powers to manage all aspects of fighter production and overcome any supply bottlenecks. Nevertheless, an increase in fighter production of the magnitude required could only be achieved by reducing production of all other categories of aircraft. The result



ABOVE: An example of the segmented pattern, typical of that applied to the wings, tailplane and upper fuselage of German single-engined fighters from early 1941 is shown in this view of 'Black 17', an Fw 190 A-8 of IV./JG 54 at Müncheberg, near Berlin, in March 1945. The significance of the white stripe over the swastika is not known.

of this was that, when the new paints intended for bombers and transports began to become available, production of these categories was cut. This was to have an impact on fighter camouflage since, to avoid waste, the obvious solution was to use the bomber colours on fighter and fighter-bomber aircraft.

While the exact date on which these ex-bomber colours were first used on fighters is not known, it seems fairly certain that it was no later than August 1944 although, at least in the West, they did not make an appearance at the front until the winter of 1944. This assumption is based on the fact that the first confirmed example of the new uppersurface camouflage colours in use does not occur until Allied technical intelligence experts examined and reported on an aircraft which had been shot down on 1 January 1945. The particular report ⁴ concerned an Fw 190 D-9, W.Nr. 2100079 which had been completed in August 1944, and describes the uppersurfaces of the wings as '...a rather brighter green than is usual ...'. No other colour is mentioned and the use of the word 'a' before the description 'brighter green' would therefore suggest that only one colour was used, in this case the ex-bomber colour RLM 82. In other instances, any combination of the retained grey 75 and the new greens 81, 82 or 83 may have been applied, and although 81 and 83 were not at first used together on existing fighter types, the combination later became increasingly common.



Concerning undersurfaces, ambiguous wartime correspondence from June and July 1944 exists which shows that the RLM and the *Jägerstab* had agreed that, at some time in the future, undersurfaces were not to be *camouflaged*. This is not to say, however, that undersides were to be left completely unpainted as the correspondence concerned relates to a trial batch of 50 Fw 190s which were to be tested with primer finish only. Unfortunately, the results of these tests are not known and there was at first no clear directive which stated how, in this period of change, the undersurfaces of Bf 109s and Fw 190s were to be painted. Photographs seldom help as the undersides are invariably in shadow, and there is not a single Allied crash report which mentions anything other than painted undersurfaces. One

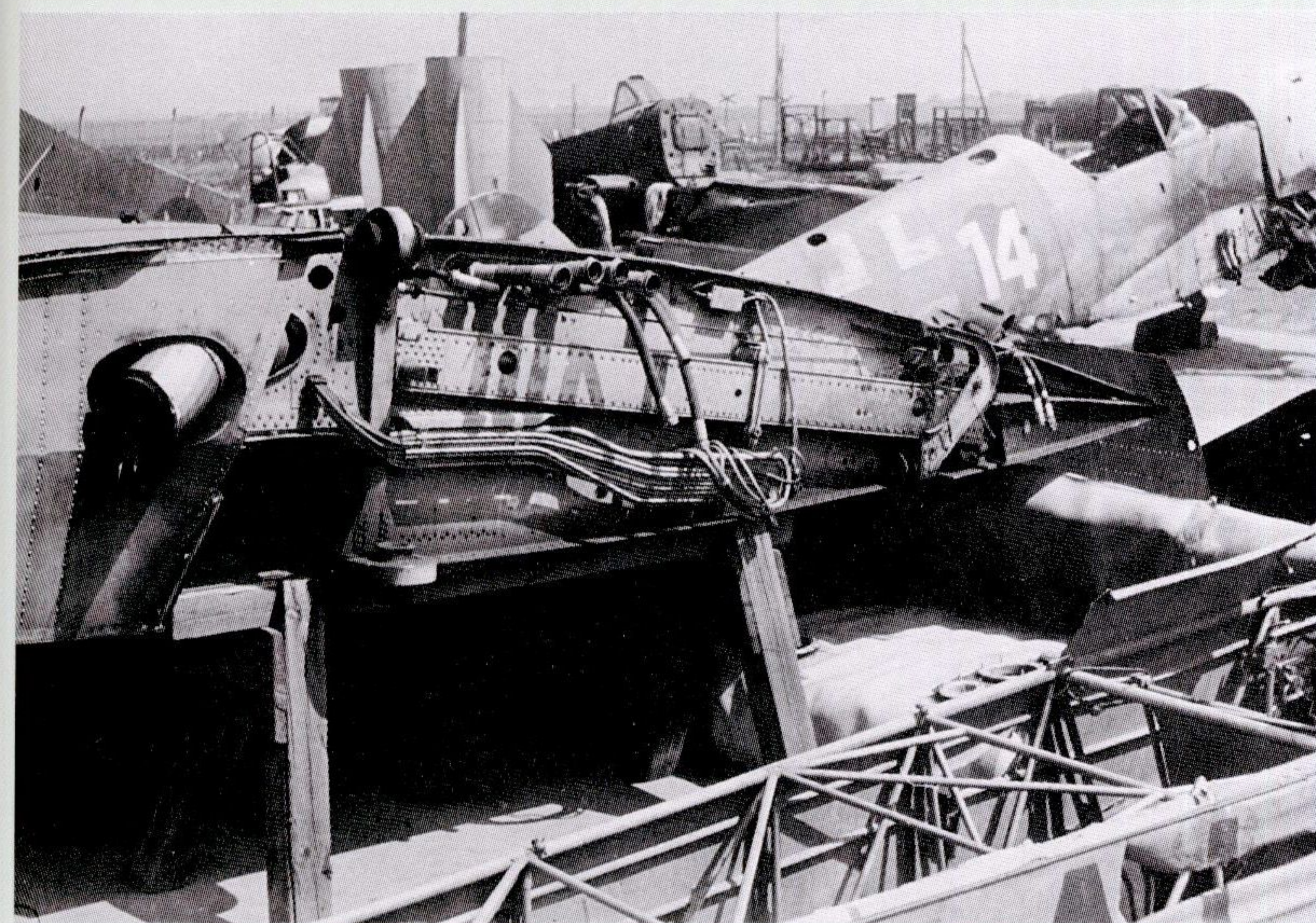
ABOVE: Taken at Letnany after the war, this photograph shows the undersurface of a Bf 109 K-4 wing, with the fuselage of a G-10 behind. The wing undersurface is largely natural metal with grey 76 only on the aileron and around the radiator, but the lack of a Balkenkreuz indicates that painting was still incomplete and it may not have been the intention to leave the wing in this condition. This, together with the reported examples of undersurface colours still being applied in late 1944 and early 1945, may indicate that natural metal undersurfaces were the exception rather than the rule.

must, however, question how practical it was for Allied technical intelligence experts to investigate the underneath of a belly-landed aircraft. Assuming these investigators were experienced in German aircraft camouflage, would they not, perhaps, have taken it for granted that the colour of the undersurfaces were bound to be the same as on the fuselage sides?

Eventually, instructions were issued that only the fuselage sides and any components under the wings and fuselage made of wood, steel or fabric were to be painted in 76, leaving all aluminium alloy under the wings in its natural metal finish. To what extent this was ever adopted is not known, but it is thought that natural metal undersides were the exception rather than the rule, at least as far as the Bf 109 and Fw 190 are concerned. Perhaps for the reason suggested above, no Allied report includes any mention of natural metal undersurfaces. On the contrary, a description of an Me 262 shot down on 28 November 1944 states the undersurfaces were 'light grey' ⁵ while the report on the Fw 190 D-9 W.Nr. 210079 states the 'undersides of the wings are light blue'. It would seem, then, that at the end of 1944/beginning of 1945, the new greens were already in evidence but that undersurfaces continued to be painted. This situation regarding undersurfaces may, however, have changed later on, especially in the case of the Me 262 and the Ta 152 where examples of unpainted undersurfaces are thought to have been a little more frequent.

It should also be noted that the colours of the new uppersurface paints 81, 82 and 83 varied greatly, as also did 75, the latter perhaps being the result of mixing the withdrawn 74 with a lighter colour to give an approximation to 75. Similarly, the undersurface colour 76 could also vary noticeably and a number of shades have been observed ranging from a distinctive yellowish-green tinge very similar in colour to the British Sky Type 'S', to a much lighter, whitish blue.

Apart from changes to the camouflage schemes, national markings were also to be simplified so that generally, crosses were to consist of only the corner segments and the swastika was to be solid or in outline, but in only one colour. On light camouflage finishes, the *Balkenkreuze* and *Hakenkreuze* were to be in black, while the markings on darker finishes were to be in white. An exception was that on Messerschmitt aircraft, the underwing crosses on the Bf 109 K were to consist of solid black centres without any outlines. Fuselage crosses consisted of white corner segments on a square of the darkest camouflage colour which came down the fuselage sides to the width and depth of the cross in order to provide the required contrast. Yet even in this respect, sectors of the aircraft industry were remarkably reluctant to adopt the required economy measures and it was necessary to issue several reminders, as confirmed by a document from August 1944 which states, *'It is apparent that, despite repeated instructions for simplification, economy measures etc, Balkenkreuze and*



ABOVE: Believed to be taken at Prague-Kbely, the fuselage of 'White 14' has the late-war low demarcation scheme typical of the Bf 109 K-4 and may well be an example of that variant. Note, incidentally, that among the other materiel in this scene are some tail units for the V-2 rocket and the fuselage of a Ju 87 D.

appeared in *Oberflächenschutzliste* 8 Os 155, but less evidence exists concerning aircraft which received the additional application of a regular pattern of sprayed spots in a contrasting light colour, probably RLM 76, although shades varied considerably. Significantly, with the exception of the Bf 109 G coded 'Black 29' featured on Page 180, other Bf 109s seen in this finish are known to have been photographed on Wunstorf airfield, which was where aircraft which had been repaired at the Leichtmetallwerke Hannover-Laatzen factory were flight tested. The spotted scheme was not, therefore, a unit modification, but the extent to which it or a similar finish was applied by other factories is not known.

The exact purpose of the spots is also uncertain. One possibility is that, as aircraft were increasingly being dispersed and hidden among trees on or near airfields to conceal them from roaming Allied fighters and fighter-bombers, the intention may have been to simulate the appearance of dappled sunlight shining through leaves, similar to the so-called 'ambush' scheme seen on some German armoured fighting vehicles in Normandy in 1944. However, while this supposition appears quite reasonable in the case of the He 111 shown, it seems odd that on the Bf 109s the light spots were applied only to the fuselage sides and not over all upper surfaces. The extent of the spots when applied to the Fw 190 is not known.

No written reference to this spotted scheme has yet been found but, as industry had been *'forbidden to use any other colour shades and schemes, including special requests from operational units'*,⁶ it is reasonable to suppose that this new development had been approved by the RLM. Similarly, only a few photographs of the spotted scheme are known, so until more evidence becomes available, any conclusions are necessarily speculative. The obvious similarity in the finish of the various aircraft types, however, and the fact that it was applied to examples of at least three different types of aircraft, (Bf 109, Fw 190 and He 111) suggests that, in

swastikas are still being applied in the original manner.' This reluctance – together with continued availability of old paint stocks – may also be a factor in explaining why the introduction of the new colours and, particularly, the implementation of any instructions regarding undersurfaces, took so long to be implemented.

In addition to the simplifications and changes already outlined, there is evidence of another scheme intended to further enhance the camouflage of aircraft on the ground. This involved abandoning the earlier segmented pattern and applying a combination of any two of the colours 81, 82 and 83 in a manner described as *'in a cloud overspray'*, which suggests they were sprayed in indistinct patches. A similar scheme is shown on the Bf 109 G-10 of 3/JG 300 on page 179.

The instructions for this 'cloud' pattern

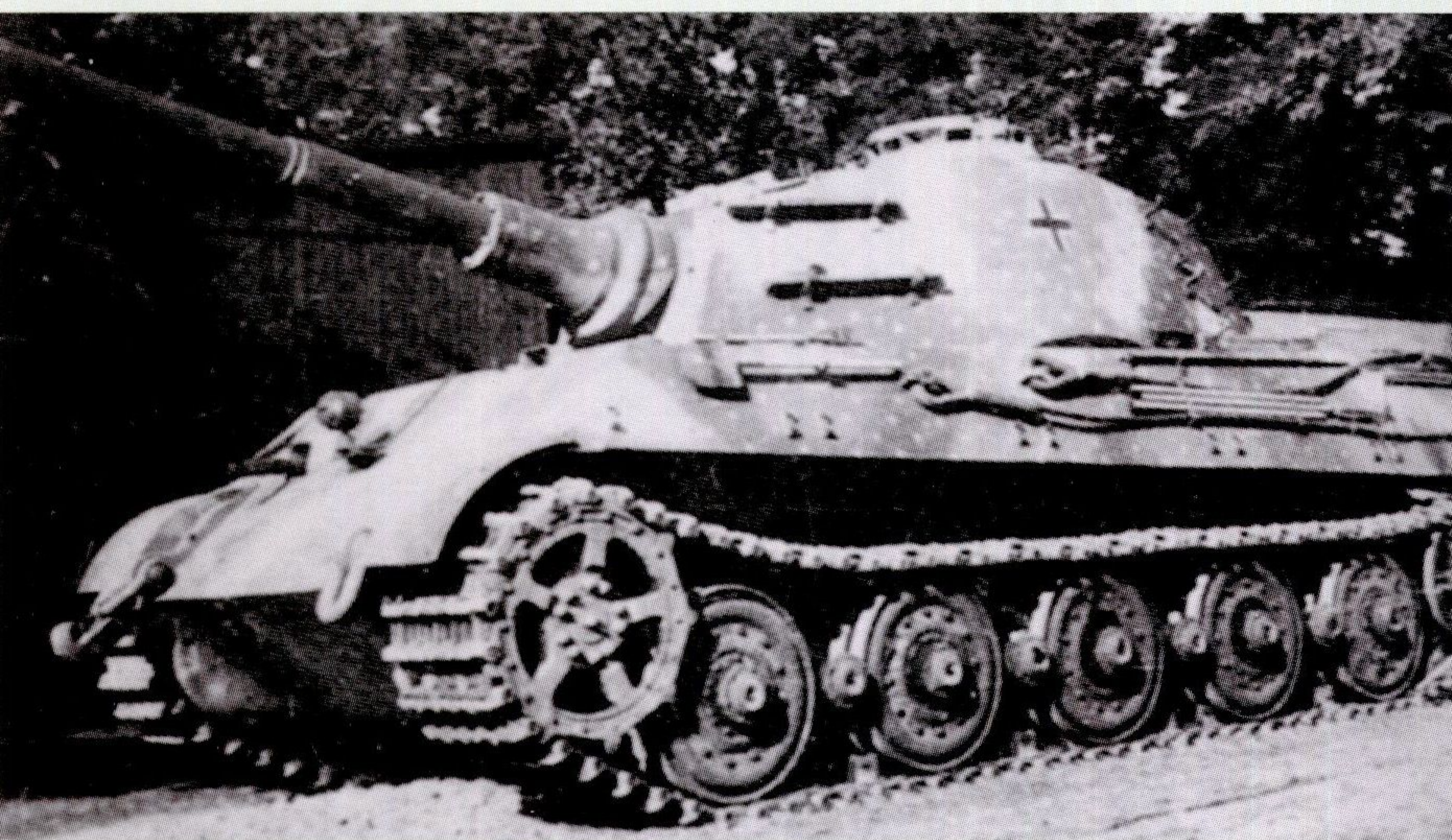
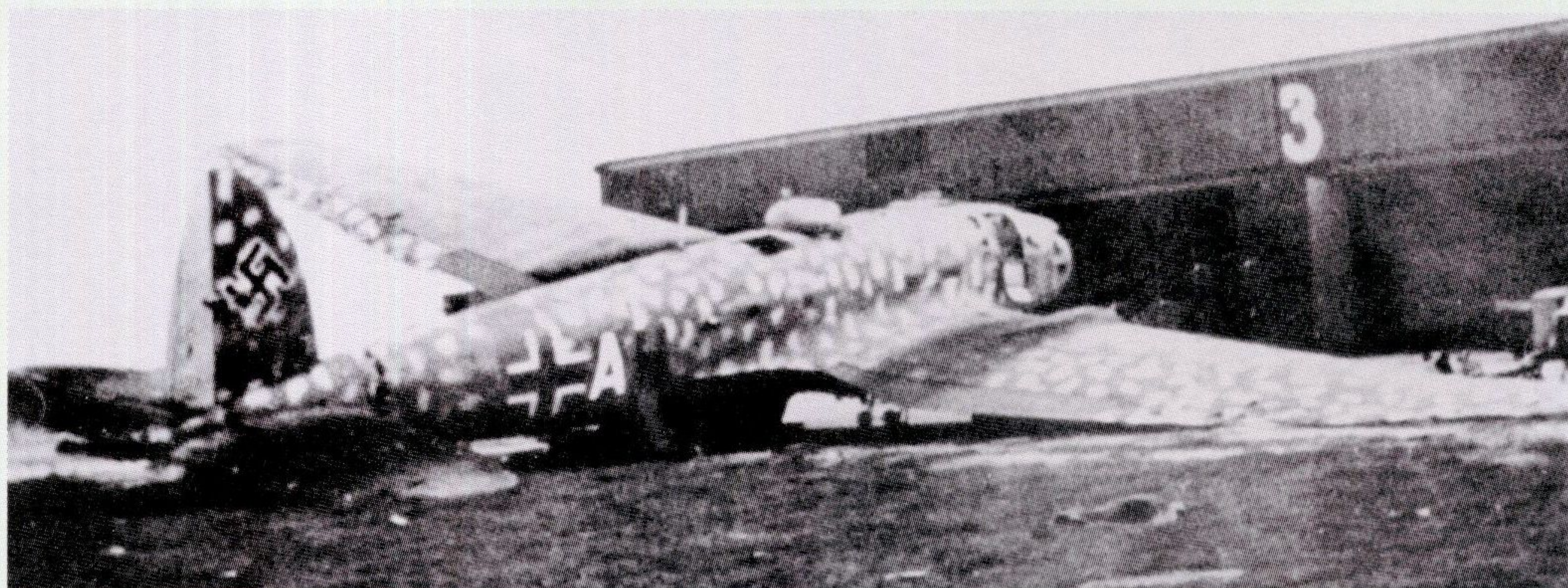
BELOW: This view of a Bf 109 G-6 or G-14 at Wunstorf shows the overall dark finish with light coloured mottling which extends well down the fuselage sides to include the area below the exhausts where the spots become darker against the undersurface colour.





LEFT: The tail unit of an Fw 190 F-8 showing a similar dark finish oversprayed with spots of a lighter colour.

RIGHT An He 111 of KG 4 showing that the use of virtually the same scheme extended to categories other than single-engined fighter aircraft. The fact that the uppersurface of the wings and tailplane on this machine show the same light patches suggests that it may have been the RLM's intention to finish the uppersurfaces of fighters in the same way, although photographic evidence of this has not yet been located.



LEFT: A Tiger II Ausf. B, the heaviest and most powerful tank to enter service during the Second World War, in the late war 'ambush' scheme. Note that to simulate dappled sunlight, the basic sand, green and brick red camouflage pattern has been flecked with light-coloured spots in much the same way as the Luftwaffe finish shown here.

the interests of ultimate simplification, it may have been the intention to introduce a universal scheme applicable to all current types then in production. If that is the case, then perhaps these photographs show that it had already been introduced on a limited scale before the final German collapse.

As a final note, it is worth mentioning that whatever economies were introduced to the final finishing of *Luftwaffe* aircraft, all panel joints with the exception of those between cowlings and hatches which would be regularly opened for servicing, refuelling and rearming etc, continued to be meticulously filled and sanded flush. Therefore, even though aircraft factories may have applied camouflage so perfunctorily that the filler was still visible through the paint, under normal conditions, panel lines other than those mentioned above and so meticulously featured in plastic construction kits as engraved lines, simply were not visible.

1. See, for example, page 128, Volume 3, Section 2 and pages 243 and 258-259 in Volume 4, Section 3 of this series.
2. RLM Message GL/C-E 10 Nr. 10585/43 (IVE) Az.82b 10 dated 21 August 1943.
3. In plan view, the grey and green camouflage was therefore very similar to that already employed by the RAF.
4. A.I.2(g) Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report Serial No. 263 dated 8 January 1945.
5. A.I.2(g) Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report Serial No. 265 dated 29 January 1945.
6. Sammelmitteilung Nr. 2, 15 August 1944.

The Fall of Rumania

In the summer of 1944, a combined force of over 900,000 German and Rumanian troops stood in defence of Rumania against the 1.3 million Soviet troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts. These Soviet forces were supported by the reinforced 5 VA and 17 VA with a total of some 1,800 aircraft, and with the additional aircraft of the Black Sea Fleet, the VVS ChF, the Soviets were able to field over 2,600 aircraft. Opposing them were 300 Axis fighters, and although the *Luftwaffe* deployed I./JG 53, II./JG 52 and III./JG 77 to the defence of Rumania, the majority of the available fighter aircraft belonged to the Rumanian Air Force.

On 20 August, the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts opened their final offensive against Rumania. For II./JG 52, the air fighting over Rumania on the 23rd resulted in only two victories but three Bf 109s being lost, one of which was flown by *Lt.* Heinz Sachsenberg who survived but was severely wounded. On the same day, the Rumanian King Mihail discharged Marshal Antonescu's government and the new Rumanian government declared that it wished to end its participation in the war against the USSR. A furious Hitler ordered the *Wehrmacht* to attack the Rumanian forces in an attempt to help reinstate Marshal Antonescu and among other measures, I./KG 4 and I./SG 2 were ordered to attack government installations in Bucharest. This only served to destroy the uneasy truce which existed between the two former allies and fighting broke out between them. In this confused situation, Rumanian fighter pilots shot down both German and Soviet aircraft alike. On the 25th, the new Rumanian government formally declared war against Germany and as German troops retreated from Rumania, the situation became chaotic.

On 28 August, several Rumanian Bf 109 G-6s were shot down by German Bf 109 G-6s and on the 29th III./JG 77 claimed to have shot down another two Rumanian Bf 109s. During the headlong retreat from Rumania, III./JG 77 was forced to leave behind *Lt.* Johann Pichler, a *Ritterkreuzträger* with 52 victories, who was being treated in hospital for the wounds he had sustained in air combat. Pichler was taken into

Soviet captivity and eventually returned to Germany. Post-war, he freely admitted that, in view of the overwhelming losses subsequently suffered by the *Jagdarmee*, being captured probably saved his life.

During German Army Group South Ukraine's retreat from Rumania across the Carpathian Mountains, and into Hungary, aerial encounters between German and Rumanian fliers grew in frequency, particularly after 16 September when *Uffz.* Heinrich Tammen of II./JG 52 shot down a Rumanian IAR 81C piloted by *Adj. Stag. av.* Iosif Chiuahulescu. Three days later, *Uffz.* Tammen destroyed two Rumanian Bf 109s, one of which was flown by *SLt. av.* Andrei Popa who made a successful emergency landing, while the other was flown by *SLt.* Stefan Ciutac, credited with 11 victories, who baled out. These were just three of the ten Rumanian aircraft destroyed by Tammen within a period of two weeks.

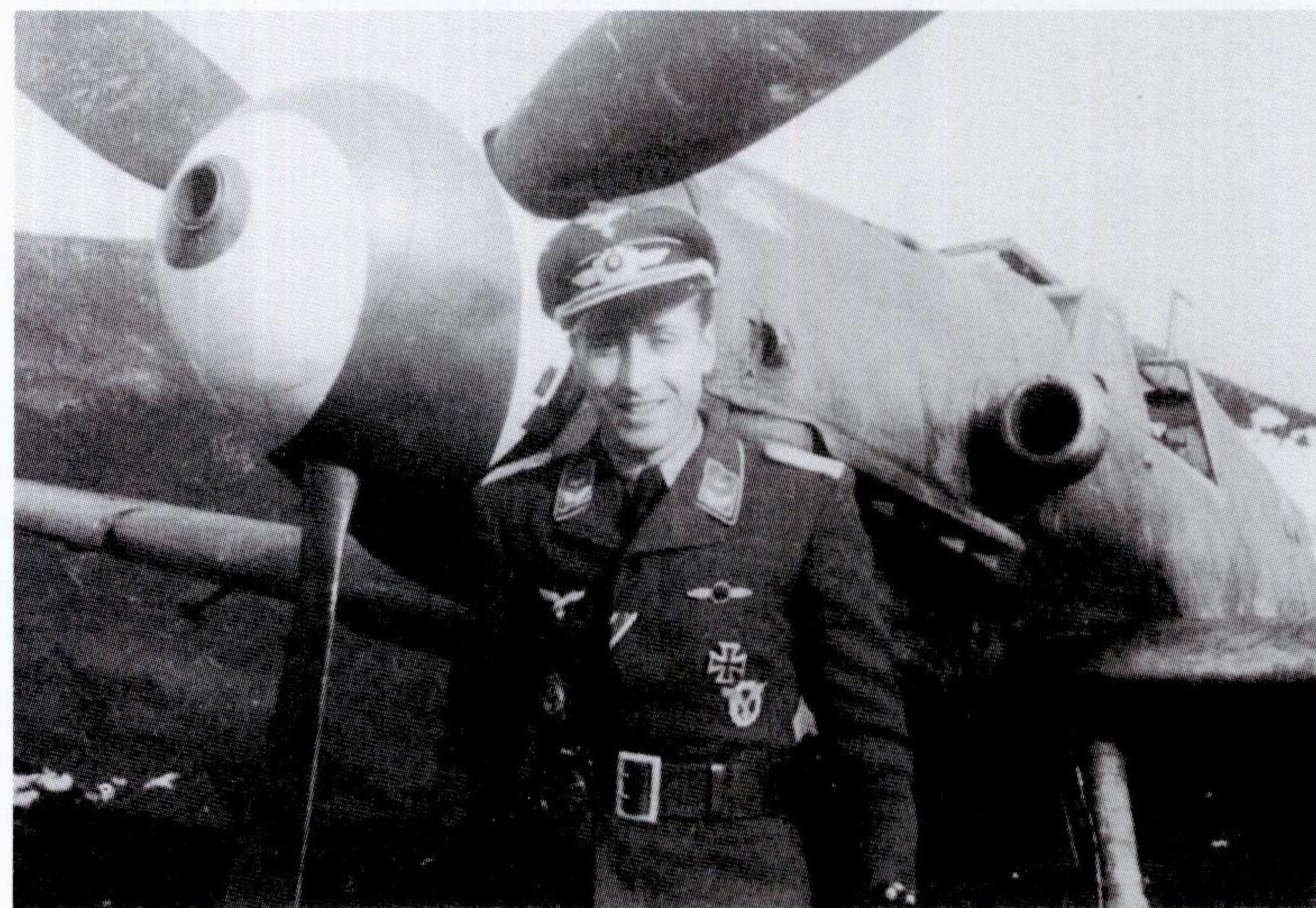
On 20 September Army Group South Ukraine was renamed Army Group South. By that time, the Army Group, which had a strength of 500,000 German troops just one month earlier, had been reduced to only 200,000.

The Autumn Battles

In September 1944 the Germans managed to restore their front lines and hold the Soviets at bay. In Poland, the frontline ran more or less along the Vistula river but savage street-fighting raged inside the Polish capital of Warsaw where the resistance forces had risen against the Germans. On 10 September, the Soviet 1st Belorussian Front, including the 1st Free Polish Army, attacked the German bridgehead on the Vistula near Warsaw and four days later seized the Warsaw suburb of Praga, but the retreating German troops then blew up all the Vistula bridges. On the night of



ABOVE: *Lt.* Heinz Sachsenberg of II./JG 52. This pilot was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 9 June 1944 when he had 101 victories but was seriously injured in air combat on 23 August 1944. Sachsenberg survived the war with 104 victories but never fully recovered from his war wounds and died in June 1951.



ABOVE: In addition to the threat from the Soviets and their new Rumanian allies was the US 15th Air Force operating from bases in Italy. On 31 August 1944, *Oblt.* Otto Fönnekold, a successful pilot and *Staffelkapitän* of 5./JG 52 who had been awarded the German Cross in Gold in August 1943 and the Knight's Cross in March 1944, attacked a formation of 15th Air Force Mustangs and managed to shoot down three, raising his total victories to 136. However, while Fönnekold was landing at his own airfield, his Bf 109 was attacked by Mustangs and the 24-year-old fighter pilot crashed after being killed by a bullet through his heart.

13/14 September, Soviet transport aircraft began dropping arms and supplies to aid the Polish resistance forces in Warsaw and on the 16th the 1st Free Polish Army initiated a series of desperate but unsuccessful attempts to relieve the hard-pressed Poles in Warsaw. Meanwhile, the Soviets, who had refused the USAAF and RAF permission to use Soviet airfields for their intended supply operations to Warsaw, relented, and the first supply flight from the West began on the 18th when 107 B-17s released 1,248 supply containers. Although only one B-17 was lost, *Lt.* Dornbacher and *Oblt.* Günther Josten, both of I./JG 51, each claimed to have shot one down, Josten's victory being his 123rd. At least two of I./JG 51's Bf 109 G-6s were shot down, presumably by return fire from the Fortress gunners.

In the north Baltic area, *Lt.* Gerhard Thyben of JG 54 claimed four victories on the 15th and six on the 16th. Meanwhile, two days earlier, *Hptm.* Franz Eisenach, *Kommandeur* of I./JG 54, attained his 100th victory by claiming nine Soviet aircraft shot down on 14 September, but was severely injured during a Soviet air attack on 21 September when the Soviet 2nd and 3rd Baltic fronts resumed their offensive. On the 22nd, III./JG 51 reported a singular success over the Baltic coast of Lithuania when it claimed to have shot down an entire formation of six Soviet Boston torpedo bombers.

In Hungary, German Army Group South and Hungarian forces managed to halt Soviet forces which were suffering from shortages resulting from their over-extended supply lines running from Rumania across the Carpathian Mountains. Similarly, a desperate shortage in fuel also hampered *Luftwaffe* activity in this area and as a consequence of this, III./JG 77 was pulled back to Germany, leaving II./JG 52 and I./JG 53 as the only German fighter units in Hungary. In this area, *Lt.* Peter Düttmann of II./JG 52 attained his 100th victory on 24 September, and the next day claimed three of the five IAR 80s destroyed by the *Gruppe*. The Rumanians actually lost six IAR 80s in this clash and three pilots killed, one of which was *Lt. av.* Ioan Ivanciovici who had been credited with 11 victories.

Comparing the various records for the Rumanian Air Force's fight against the VVS, the USAAF and the *Luftwaffe*, historian Dénes Bernád concludes that the *Luftwaffe* was 'the deadliest enemy of them all.' Up to the end of September 1944, the Rumanian Air Force's so-called Western Campaign against the *Luftwaffe* cost the Rumanian fighter units the loss of 25 fighters and 12 pilots killed against only four victory claims. This naturally reflects the still very high overall quality of the *Luftwaffe* on the Eastern Front, but when *Obstlt.* Hermann Graf arrived at Krakow on 20 September 1944 to assume command of JG 52, he noted that the quality of pilots in this *Jagdgeschwader* was dramatically superior to those of JG 11 which he had previously commanded in the *Reichsverteidigung*. In early October 1944, no fewer than thirteen pilots in JG 52 were credited with more than 100 victories each.

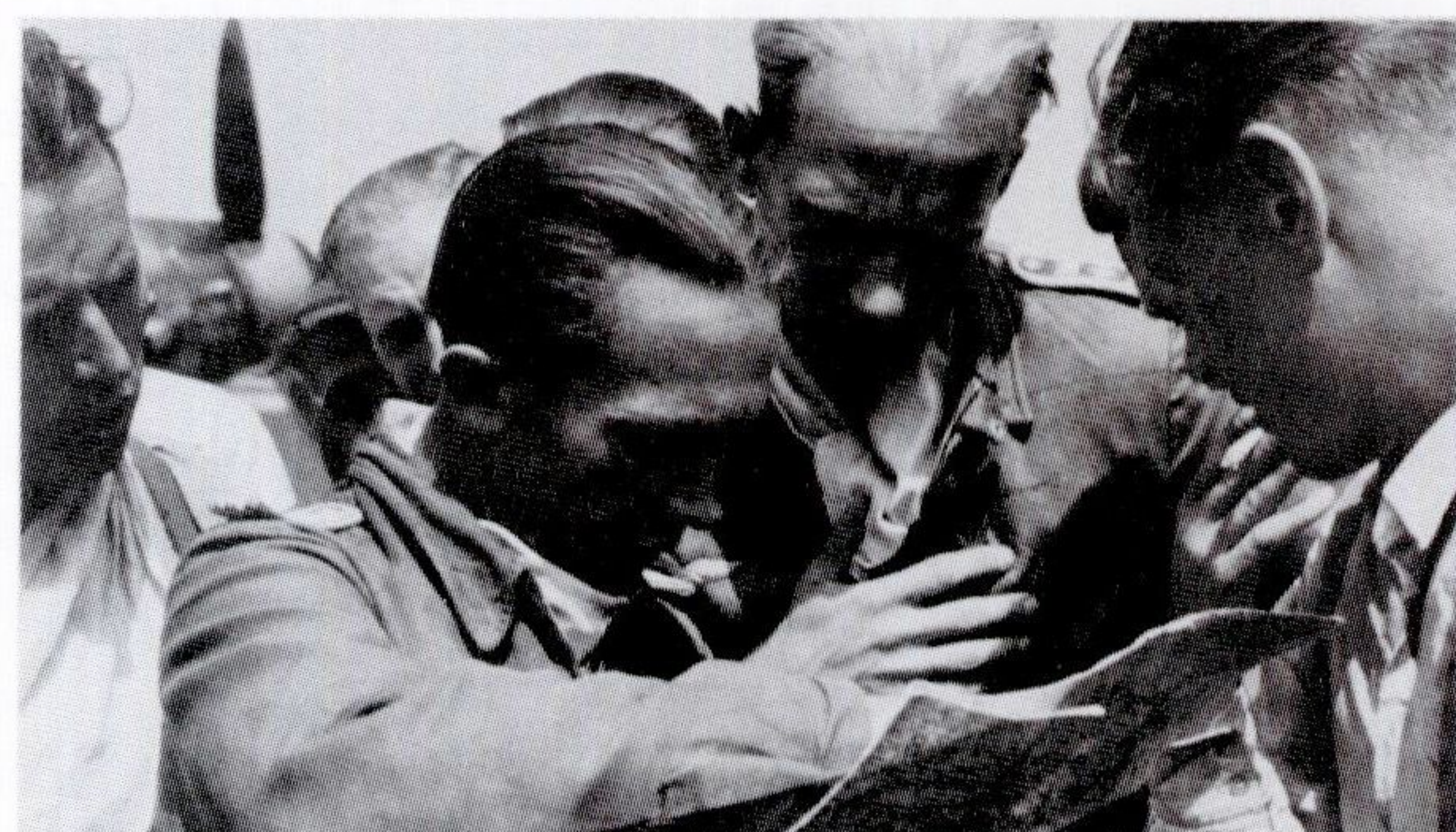
The Polish resistance forces in Warsaw surrendered on 2 October, but the war at the front flared up again on 5 October when the 1st Baltic Front opened a new offensive against German 3. *Panzerarmee* in Lithuania. This offensive received the powerful support of the VVS which carried out repeated attacks against Memel and Libau. It was in this region that the *Eichenlaubträger Hptm.* Günther Schack of III./JG 51, then with, 161 victories, was shot down and injured on 6 October.

North of Warsaw, the re-constructed German 2nd Army fought vehemently to prevent the 2nd Belorussian Front from breaking into East Prussia from the south. In this sector, IV./JG 51 was able to inflict heavy losses on the VVS which, concentrating entirely on providing tactical support for its ground troops, restricted its fighters by assigning them close escort missions. Thus on 7 October, pilots of IV./JG 51 were able to claim 25 victories, including nine by *Ofw.* Heinz Marquardt.

In the south, the Soviet forces which had swept through Rumania and pursued the Germans across the Carpathian mountains attacked German Army Group South between Szeged and Nagyvárad in Hungary. German armoured forces counter-attacked at Debrecen, and in a large tank battle which took place between 10 and 14 October, succeeded in destroying the Soviet spearhead.

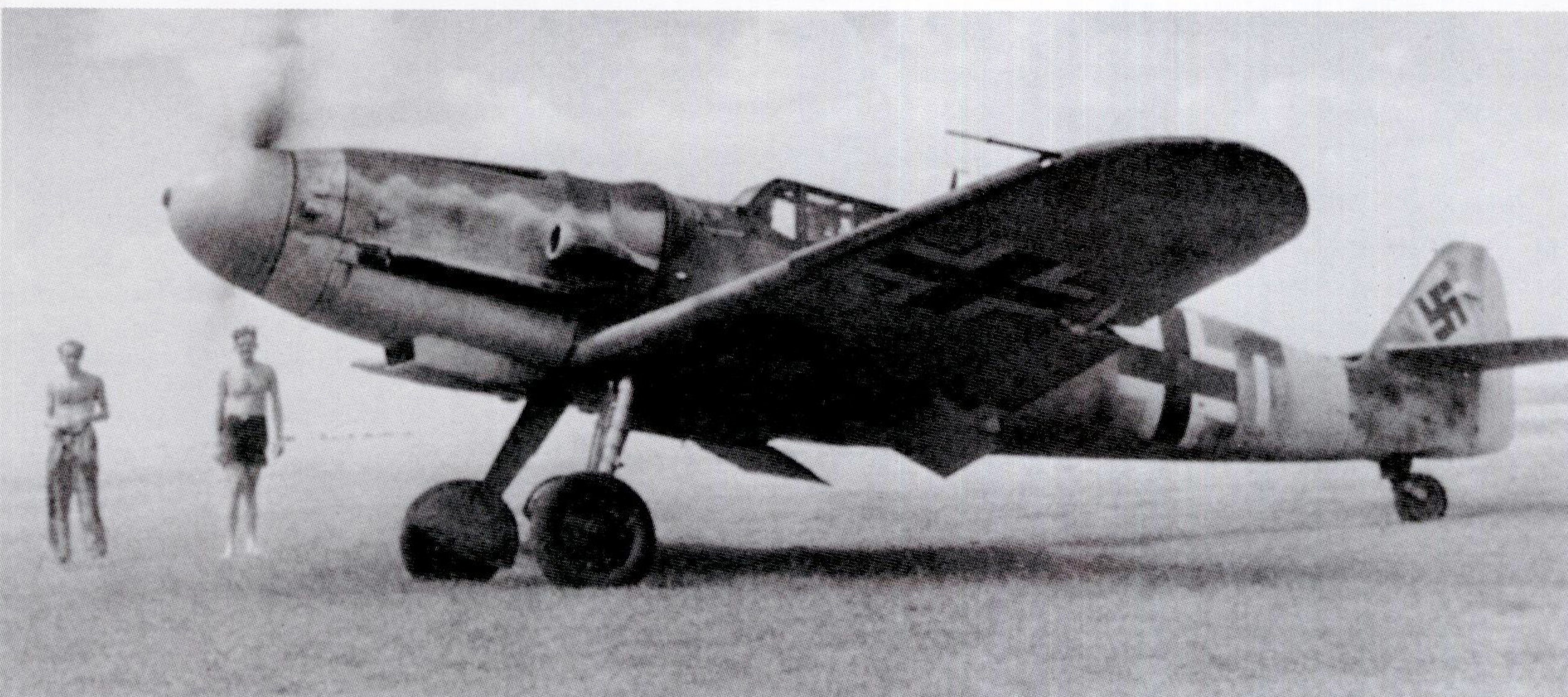
On 10 October, the 1st Baltic Front reached the Baltic coast north of Memel, isolating *Heeresgruppe Nord* in what became known as the Courland pocket. The seven Soviet aircraft claimed shot down by II./JG 54's *Hptm.* Erich Rudorffer on the same day, which brought his official tally to 194 victories, had, of course, no influence on the general, overall situation. The same may be said of JG 51's top scorer, *Oblt.* Anton Hafner of III. *Gruppe*, who was fighting in the same area and shot down two Yak-9s on 14 October and surpassed the 200-victory mark by downing six Soviet aircraft on 15 October. However, when the 1st Baltic Front made an attempt to crush the Courland pocket on 16 October, it was beaten back with severe losses.

An even greater threat to the Germans was posed by the 3rd Belorussian Front, which on 16 October opened an offensive against East Prussia. To defend this area, *Luftflotte* 6 received considerable reinforcements, including III./JG 51 from Courland, and the *Stabsstaffel* and I. and III./JG 52 from *Luftflotte* 4.



LEFT, ABOVE AND BELOW: On 15 May 1944, Anton Hafner, then a Leutnant flying with the Stabsstaffel of JG 51 and with 135 victories, became Staffelkapitän of 8./JG 51, taking over from Hptm. Fritz Stendel. On 28 June 1944, Hafner, now an Oberleutnant, attained his 150th victory, but crashed and was injured. On 15 August, 8./JG 51 was redesignated 10./JG 51 and on 16 October, Hafner shot down four Soviet fighters to bring his score to 202. Early

the following day he destroyed a Pe-2 as his 203rd victory and after taking off again a few hours later, shot down a Yak-7 as his 204th. Shortly afterwards, as the air battle descended to low level, Hafner's aircraft hit a tree and crashed with fatal results. These two photographs show the Bf 109 G-6 'Black 1', W.Nr. 442013, in which he was killed.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-6 'Black 1', W.Nr. 442013, flown by Hptm. Anton Hafner, Staffelkapitän of 10./JG 51, October 1944

Hafner probably first flew this aircraft in August 1944 and used it regularly until he crashed and was killed on 17 October. The aircraft had a tall tail assembly and was finished in the standard 74/75/76 day fighter scheme with a wavy demarcation line on the fuselage which appeared to sweep upwards behind the cockpit, possibly as a result of some repainting. The spinner and underside of the nose were yellow and the machine had a yellow band around the rear fuselage. A replacement cowl with mismatching camouflage was fitted over the engine.



With a total of 800 *Luftwaffe* aircraft concentrated in a relatively small area, large-scale air battles developed between these machines and the 3,000 aircraft of 1 VA and 4 VA. On 16 October, JG 52 lost six aircraft including that flown by *Oblt.* Rudolf Trenkel, a pilot of I. *Gruppe* with more than 100 victories, who was shot down by a French pilot of the Normandie-Niemen fighter regiment. Trenkel survived this incident by baling out and returned to his unit but in the next few days, this experienced pilot was shot down another four times, on each occasion being obliged to abandon his aircraft and take to his parachute. On 17 October, pilots of I./JG 52 claimed to have destroyed 15 Soviet aircraft but lost four more of their own. On the same day, IV./JG 51's Heinz Marquardt attained eight victories but the *Geschwader* lost *Oblt.* Anton Hafner who was killed and his entire *Schwarm* lost in combat with Soviet fighters. With 204 victories, Hafner was JG 51's highest-scoring pilot of the war.

Hafner was replaced by Heinz Marquardt, possibly then JG 51's most skilful and aggressive pilot. After refining his flying skills during many years as an instructor, Marquardt had been posted to IV./JG 51 in the summer of 1943. He obtained his first victory in October 1943 and by October 1944, in which month he was credited with 26 victories, he had increased his total to 89. The *Staffel* to which Marquardt belonged, 13./JG 51 (formerly 11./JG 51), in fact attained its greatest success of the war in October 1944, its pilots being credited with 81 victories of which the *Staffelkapitän*, Lt. Peter Kalden, contributed 19. Quite remarkably, during the same period 13./JG 51 avoided any serious losses and sustained only two pilot casualties, a victory to loss ratio far more favourable than the average on the Eastern Front at this time, although the whole of *Jagdgeschwader* 51 lost 44 aircraft to hostile activity in October 1944.

On 18 October *Ofw.* Helmut Schönfelder of JG 51's *Stabsstaffel* scored his 40th victory and on the 22nd, *Hptm.* Joachim Brendel, the *Kommandeur* of III./JG 51, reached 150 victories. Meanwhile, the strong commitment by *Luftwaffe* forces allowed the Germans to defeat the first Soviet attempt to overrun East Prussia. Supported by Fw 190 ground-attack aircraft and Ju 87 G anti-tank aircraft, the German 4th Army pulled together concentrated *Panzer* forces which attacked the Soviets at Angerapp and, after a fierce tank battle, forced them to withdraw.

During a second attempt to destroy the Courland pocket, launched by the 1st Baltic Front on 27 October, JG 54 claimed to have shot down 57 Soviet aircraft and the following day II./JG 54's *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Erich Rudorffer, reported the destruction of 11 Soviet aircraft, pushing his total tally to 209. On 29 October, over 1,800 Soviet aircraft attacked the German ground troops in Courland and on the 30th, JG 54's new *Geschwaderkommodore*, *Obstlt.* Dietrich Hrabak, attained his 125th victory. In total, the Soviets lost 779 aircraft during the battle in the Baltic countries between 14 September and 24 November 1944.

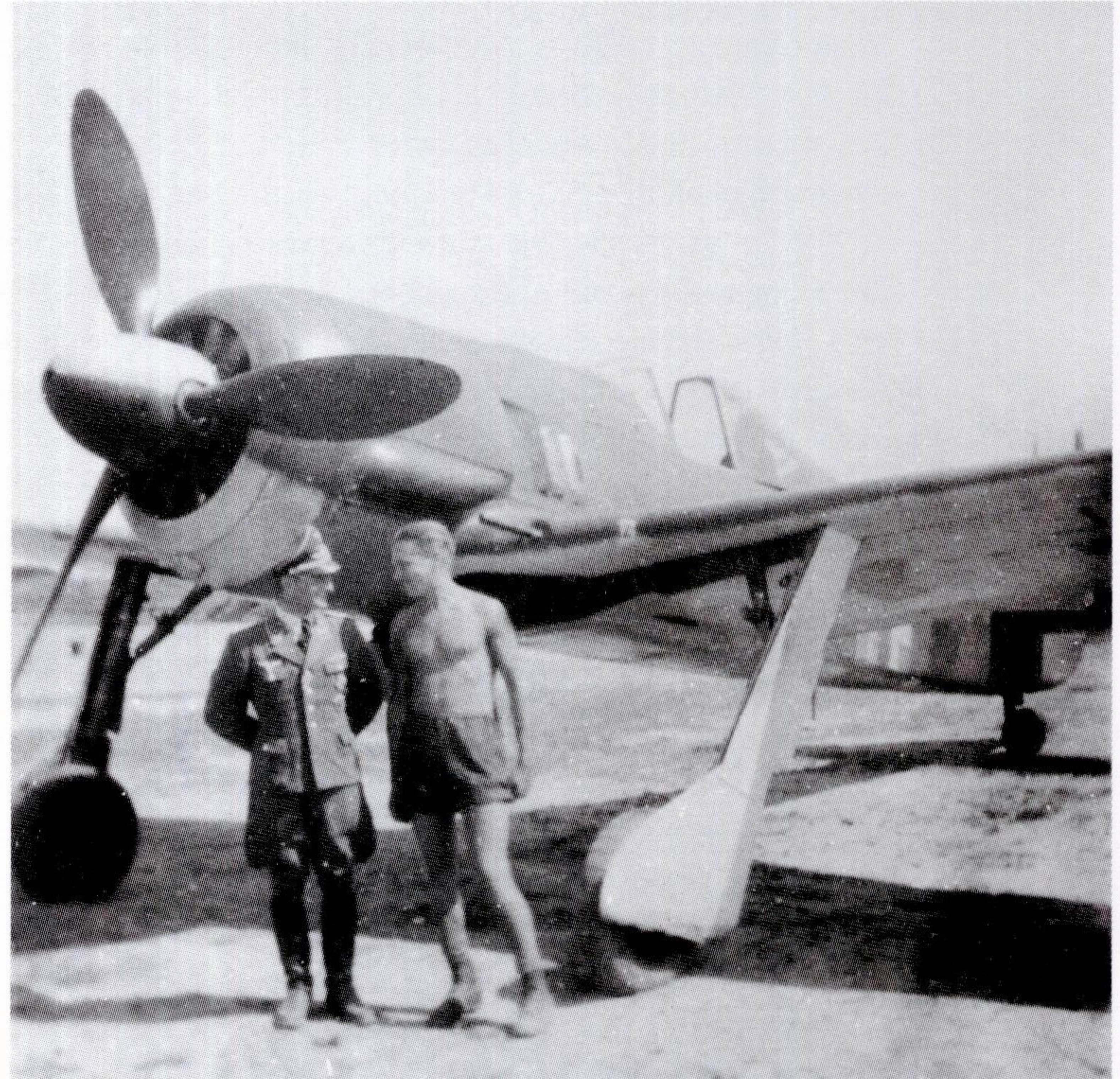
In Hungary, the 2nd Ukrainian Front managed to penetrate the German defence line at Kecskemét on 30 October, but a German counter-attack managed to restore the front again on 3 November, a month marked by an unusual calm as the Soviets reinforced their positions for their forthcoming winter offensive. Throughout November, the Germans reported no more than 369 Soviet aircraft shot down, making this one of the lowest monthly figures since the outbreak of the war. Aerial activity was concentrated mainly in Hungary, where the veterans of II./JG 52 were responsible for the bulk of the Soviet losses. On 13 November, Lt. Peter Düttmann of II./JG 52 attained his 127th victory but was then shot down by an Il-2. He bailed out from an altitude of just 1,000 feet and, although he landed behind enemy lines, managed to evade capture and returned to friendly territory.

On 14 November II./JG 52's *Gruppenkommandeur*, Major Gerhard Barkhorn, attained his 275th victory and during the next few weeks he claimed another 26. At this time, Barkhorn was still trying to cope with the feeling of anxiety that he had experienced when he was shot down by a Soviet fighter in May 1944 and he was still disturbed whenever even friendly aircraft were flying behind him.

BELOW:

Lt. Joachim Birkner, the *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 52, who was killed at Krakow on 14 December 1944 when his aircraft crashed while taking off.





ABOVE AND RIGHT: Oblt. Helmut Wettstein of JG 54, shown here with his Fw 190 A-4 'White 12' and a member of the ground personnel, claimed at least ten victories on the Eastern Front in 1944. The first of these, a Yak-9, occurred on 4 April when Wettstein was a member of 1./JG 54, after which he transferred to II. Gruppe, possibly to the 5. Staffel. In September, he claimed two more Yak-9s, three Il-2s and an La-5, and on 15 December, by which time he was flying with Stab II./JG 54, he claimed a Yak-9 and two Pe-2s, one of these being JG 54's 9,000th victory of the war. As a Hauptmann, Wettstein later became Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 54, which he led until the end of the war. These photographs are believed to have been taken at Libau in the summer or early autumn of 1944 and, although by that time the wide yellow fuselage band used by JG 54 had largely disappeared, it is still present on Wettstein's machine.

Focke-Wulf Fw 190 A-4 'White 12' flown by Oblt. Helmut Wettstein of Stab II./JG 54, Libau, 1944

Oblt. Wettstein's 'White 12' was finished in a two-tone green Eastern Front summer scheme, the darker green being similar to 71. This had clearly been applied over the original camouflage colours, as shown by the swastika which is in a square of 76 mottled with 74 and 75. Note the small patch of 76 just outboard of the port wing cannon, on which is the aircraft's tactical number 12, but in black.



December Battles

The bitter fighting on the two flanks of the Eastern Front resumed in December 1944. In the south, the Soviet 3rd Ukrainian Front advanced via Belgrade in Yugoslavia into Hungary and reached Lake Balaton, south of Budapest, on 3 December. On 5 December the 2nd Ukrainian Front re-opened its offensive to the north and south of the city, but was beaten back by German reinforcements.

JG 52 lost one of its best pilots on 14 December when *Lt.* Joachim Birkner, the *Staffelkapitän* of 9.*Karayastaffel*/JG 52, crashed while taking off from Krakow aerodrome and was killed. Although he had flown 284 combat missions, only 121 of them had included air combat, yet he had achieved 117 victories.

Further north, another significant event involving German fighters on the Eastern Front took place on 14 December when the Soviets carried out two attacks against Libau with a total of 60 aircraft of which 22 were destroyed. This, however, did not prevent the Soviet bombers from sinking seven German ships and damaging another four, but when the attack was repeated with 200 aircraft on 15 December, JG 54 claimed a further 30 Soviet bombers and eight escort fighters shot down. One of these, a Yak-9 destroyed by *ObLt.* Wettstein, was JG 54's 9,000th victory and *Ofw.* Hans-Joachim Kroschinski of I./JG 54 increased his score to 64 by shooting down three bombers. The attacks on the 15th had, however, resulted in the destruction of 11 of JG 54's aircraft on the ground.

In the south, the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts launched a combined attack on 20 December to envelop the Hungarian capital of Budapest. During this battle, JG 52 lost another of its *Experten* when 158-victory ace *Hptm.* Heinrich Sturm of II. *Gruppe* was killed during a take-off accident on 22 December.

On 21 December, the Soviet 1st Baltic Front made a further attempt to destroy the Courland pocket. Out of almost 2,500 Soviet sorties flown on the first day, the Germans claimed to have shot down 42 aircraft. I./JG 54's *Ofw.* Hans-Joachim Kroschinski accounted for five Pe-2s, after which he was himself shot down and badly wounded, and *Lt.* Gerhard Thyben contributed another four. The next day, another 1,800 VVS sorties were carried out, and the Germans claimed 39 aircraft shot down including five by *Lt.* Thyben, who thus reached a total tally of 130. On 23 December, the Soviets flew more than 2,400 sorties over the Courland pocket and on the 27th, I./JG 54 lost *Lt.* Heinz Wernicke when he collided with his wingman, *Uffz.* Wollien, during a dogfight with Yak-9s. Wernicke had been credited with 117 victories; both German pilots were killed.

The 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts were more successful in their Hungarian offensive. On 27 December, they managed to surround Budapest, beginning a bitter struggle for the capital which went on for many weeks. On 5 January 1945, II./JG 52's *Major* Gerhard Barkhorn accounted for his 300th and 301st victories, thereby securing his place in aviation history as the world's second most successful fighter pilot.

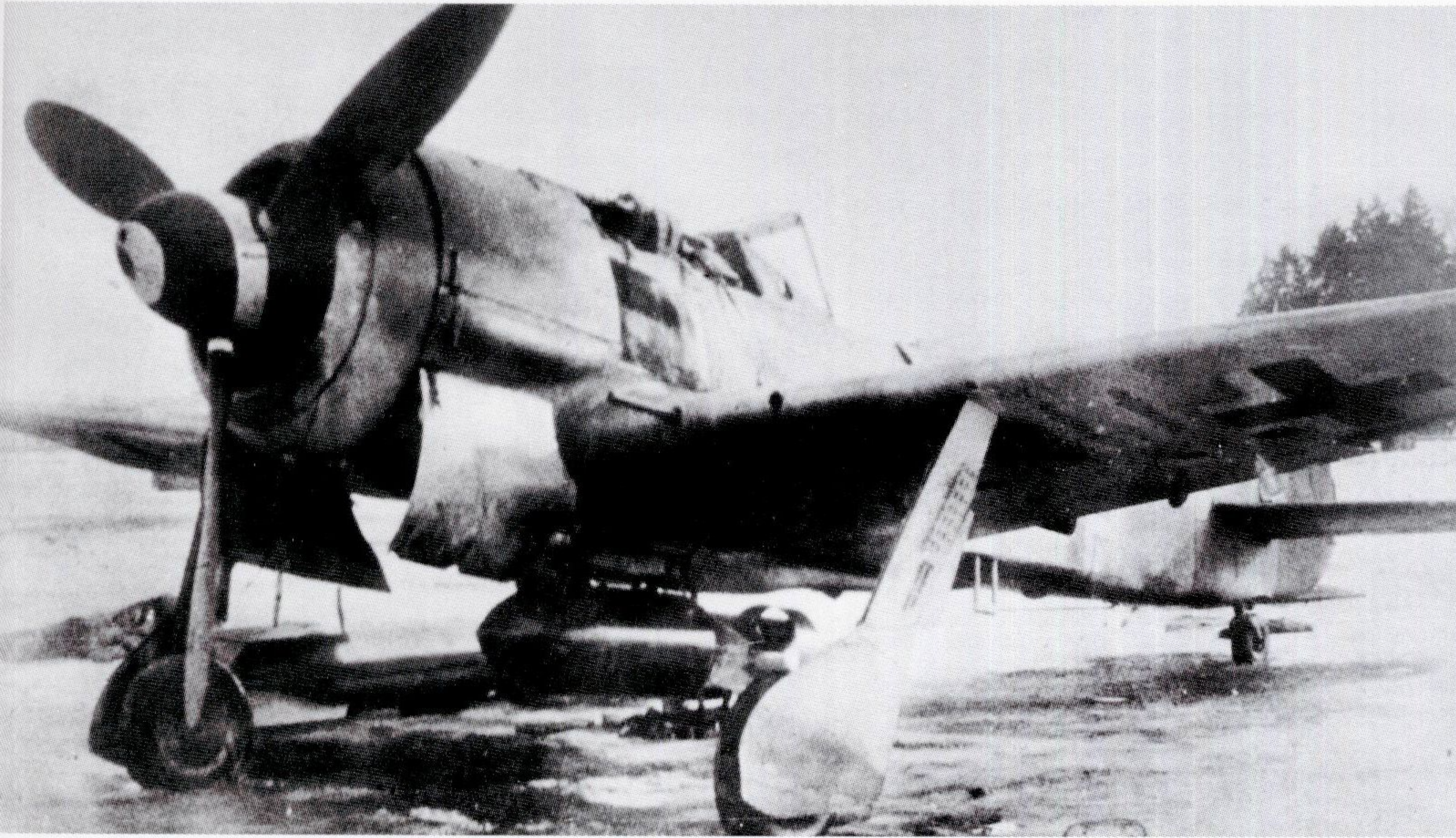
The Soviet Winter Offensive

In January 1945, the whole Eastern Front erupted when the Red Army opened its long-anticipated major offensive against Germany. The offensive began on 12 January 1945 when *Marshal* Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front attacked from the Vistula bridgehead at Baranov. This was followed on the 13th when *Marshal* Georgiy Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front launched attacks from the bridgeheads at Magnuszew and Pulawy. Meanwhile, the 3rd Belorussian Front attacked *Generaloberst* Reinhardt's *Heeresgruppe Mitte* in East Prussia, and *Marshal* Rokossovskiy's 2nd Belorussian Front launched an offensive across the Narev River toward Thorn and Elbing with the aim of isolating *Heeresgruppe Mitte* in East Prussia.

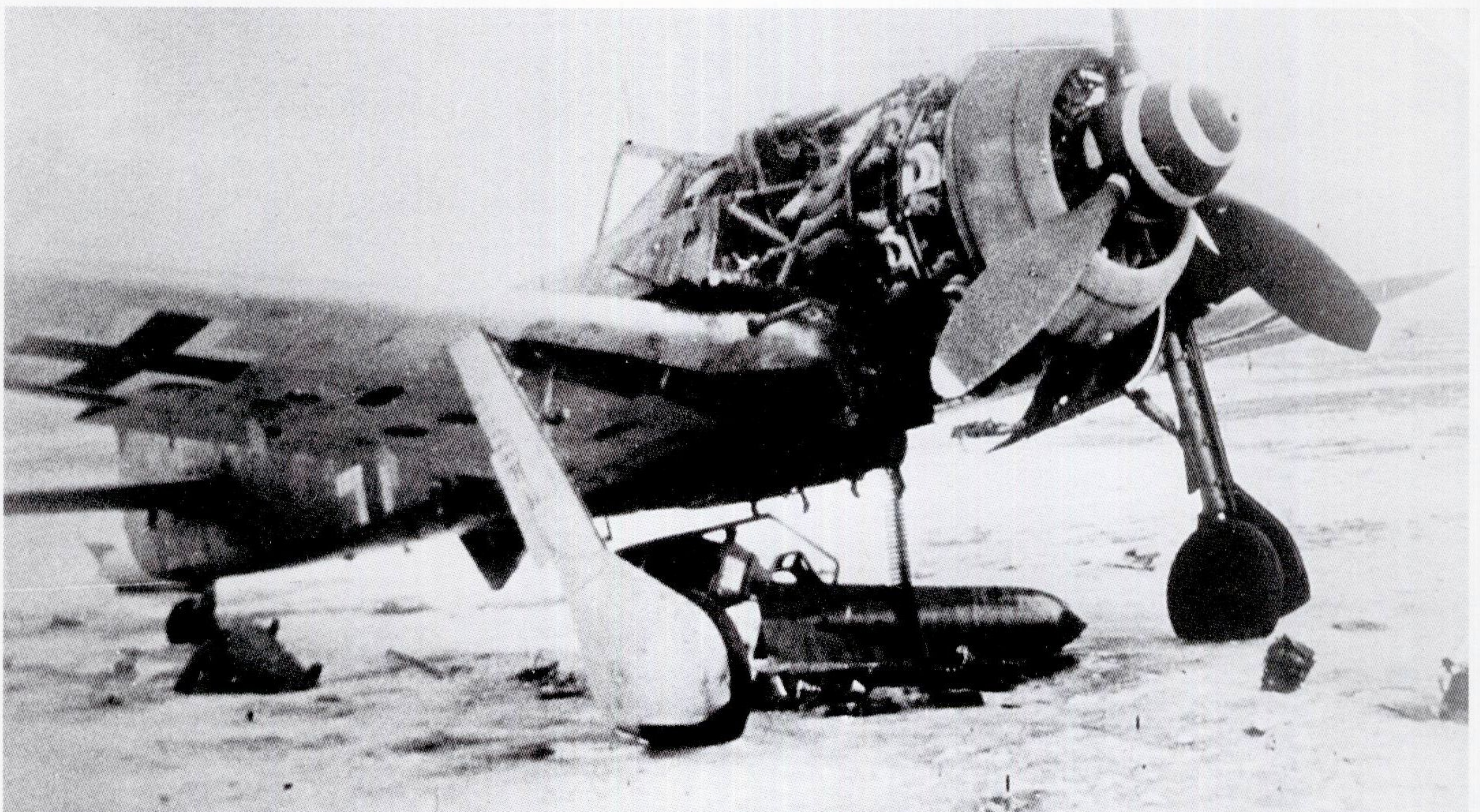
During the first days of the Soviet offensive, low clouds, fog and poor visibility grounded the aircraft on both sides, but this changed once the weather cleared. Mustering some 8,000 aircraft in support of the ground offensive, the Soviet Air Force was launched in all its might against the retreating German armies and was responsible for the defeat of a counter-attack launched against 1st Byelorussian Front at the Magnuszew bridgehead by a German *Panzerkorps* on the 15th. Two days later the 1st Free Polish Army liberated Warsaw.

Faced with this massive Soviet offensive, OKL was compelled to virtually withdraw most of the Home Defence *Jagdgeschwader* operating against Allied bombers and almost the entire *Luftwaffe* day fighter force was rapidly transferred to the Eastern Front. These units included JG 1, JG 3, JG 4, JG 6, JG 11, and JG 77.

In a matter of days, the *Luftwaffe*'s strength in the East rose from 800 to 1,800 aircraft, a force which included almost 1,500 Bf 109s and Fw 190s. In future, the greatest proportion of the air fighting



LEFT AND BELOW: Two ground-attack Fw 190s abandoned in the face of the Soviet advance in Russia. Although shown here together, it is not known whether the two aircraft belonged to the same unit or even shared the same airfield, but both appear to have been abandoned in some haste. Note that the propeller tips on the aircraft shown (*BELOW*) have been painted yellow. While this was a standard safety marking quite common in the RAF and USAAF, it is not normally seen on Luftwaffe aircraft.



in Europe in 1945 would take place on the Eastern Front, and in recognition of this the *Wehrmachtführungsstab* actually noted on 19 January that all available reserves of aviation fuel were to be allocated to air operations on the Eastern Front, adding, 'Air operations in all other theatres of war are, in comparison [to the Eastern Front], of absolutely negligible importance.'

The *Luftwaffe* units in the East became locked in a difficult combat. The dominant Soviet fighter tactic was to carry out rapid attacks by diving down from above while firing straight into the *Luftwaffe* formations, just as the *Luftwaffe* fighter pilots had done against Soviet formations during 1941 and 1942, only now the roles were reversed. Seasoned Eastern Front veterans with the experience of hundreds of combat sorties still managed to triumph in air combat, but for many of the less experienced pilots who arrived with the *Jagdgeschwader* that previously had fought the Americans and British, the situation in the East came as a shock. One of the latter subsequently told historian Jochen Prien: "The numerical superiority [of the Soviets] was not as great as that which we had encountered in the West, but their fighter pilots often were better."

On 23 January, in the centre of the offensive, the Soviet Army reached the Oder river at Oppeln. Three days later *Marshal* Rokossovskiy's 2nd Belorussian Front had completed the isolation of *Heeresgruppe*

continued on page 149

Gerhard Barkhorn

The three highest scoring pilots of all time, with over 920 victories between them, all flew with JG 52. Highest was Erich Hartmann with 352 victories, then Gerhard Barkhorn with 301, and third, Günther Rall with 275. All survived the war, although Hartmann was held in Soviet prisons for ten and a half years, and all later flew again with NATO as officers in the *Bundesluftwaffe*.

Gerhard Barkhorn was born in Königsberg in East Prussia on 20 May 1919 and joined the *Luftwaffe* as a *Fahnenjunker* in 1937. First, before he even saw an aeroplane, there was the obligatory basic military training, which included physical training, parade drill, rifle drill and field manoeuvres. Eventually, in March 1938, he began flying training, which was carried out with all the advantages of a peacetime curriculum, and on completion he was posted as a *Leutnant* to 3./JG 2.

Some sources state that his first operational experiences were gained with JG 2 over Belgium and France during the *Blitzkrieg* in the West, but if that is so then no details have emerged and it is thought that he did not make his combat debut until after he had been posted to 6./JG 52 on 1 August 1940.

When *Lt.* Barkhorn arrived with 6./JG 52, the preliminary convoy battles in the English Channel, which marked the first phase of the Battle of Britain, were drawing to a close and the *Luftwaffe* was preparing for its first attacks against RAF airfields and coastal RDF stations in southern England. Between August and the end of 1941, II./JG 52 was only twice on the Channel Front, once for 12 days at the beginning of August and again from the end of September until early November 1940, and although 6./JG 52 flew several *freie Jagd* sorties over Southern England and encountered the RAF on a number of occasions, Barkhorn claimed no victories. However, on 29 October his Bf 109 E-7 'Yellow 2' was shot down by fighters and although unhurt, he was obliged to make an emergency landing in the Channel and spent two hours in his inflatable dinghy before being rescued.

Gradually worsening weather during the winter of 1940/41 enabled II./JG 52 to be withdrawn from operations in early November and the *Gruppe* returned to Mönchen-Gladbach in Germany until shortly before Christmas when it was based at Leeuwarden. Until this time, the *Gruppe* had been equipped with the Bf 109 E, but after moving to Suwalki in early June in preparation for Operation 'Barbarossa' – the attack on the Soviet Union – the *Gruppe* began to convert to the Bf 109 F. Barkhorn immediately developed an affinity with this machine, which he rated as the best of all the variants on account of its lightness and climbing and turning abilities. However, there was still no indication that by the end of the war he would become the second most successful fighter pilot in the world, and as with a number of other *Luftwaffe* pilots, he was slow to start scoring. In fact, Barkhorn had been flying for more than a year before he claimed his first victory, but he was gaining experience which, together with a measure of luck, he considered the most important factors for a fighter pilot.

The Russian campaign opened in the early hours of 22 June 1941, and on 2 July, during his 120th war flight, Barkhorn shot down a DB-3 bomber as his first victory. He then steadily claimed further victories, and by 1 March, when he was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 4./JG 52 and took over from *Hptm.* Johannes Steinhoff, he had ten victories. On 10 July 1942, *Lt.* Barkhorn claimed three LaGG-3s, two Hurricanes and an I-16 bringing his tally to 51 and the following day he accounted for another five LaGG-3s but was wounded in combat. On 23 August, and with 64 victories, Barkhorn, now an *Oberleutnant*, was awarded the *Ritterkreuz*.

After a break of two months for a period of home leave, Barkhorn returned to the front in early October and on the 29th, during the German defence of Kerch, JG 52 attained its 1,000th victory. On the



BELOW AND
BELOW RIGHT:
Gerhard Barkhorn
at Kharkov-Rogan
in 1943 and
(BELOW RIGHT) in
the cockpit of his
aircraft at Bagerovo
on 1 December
1943.



same day, *Hptm.* Barkhorn claimed a Yak-1, possibly flown by the Soviet ace Dmitriy Kalarash, as his 75th victory. On 19 December he shot down two P-40s to bring his score to 101 and was nominated for the Oak Leaves, but by the time this decoration was awarded on 11 January 1943, his score had increased to 105 victories. He then remained *Staffelkapitän* of 4./JG 52 until 1 September 1943 when, with over 170 victories, he was promoted to *Hauptmann* and took over from *Hptm.* Helmut Kühl as *Kommandeur* of II./JG 52, which he would lead for the next 16 months.

The *Gruppe* then transferred from the Kuban bridgehead to the southern Ukraine where, in a series of desperate air battles in the next ten days, the pilots of II./JG 52 claimed to have shot down 66 Soviet aircraft, 12 of which were awarded to the *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Barkhorn. On 2 November, the *Gruppe* was transferred to the Crimea where, on 29 November, Barkhorn destroyed a P-39 and a Yak-1 as his 198th and 199th victories, followed by another Yak-1 on the 30th as his 200th victory.

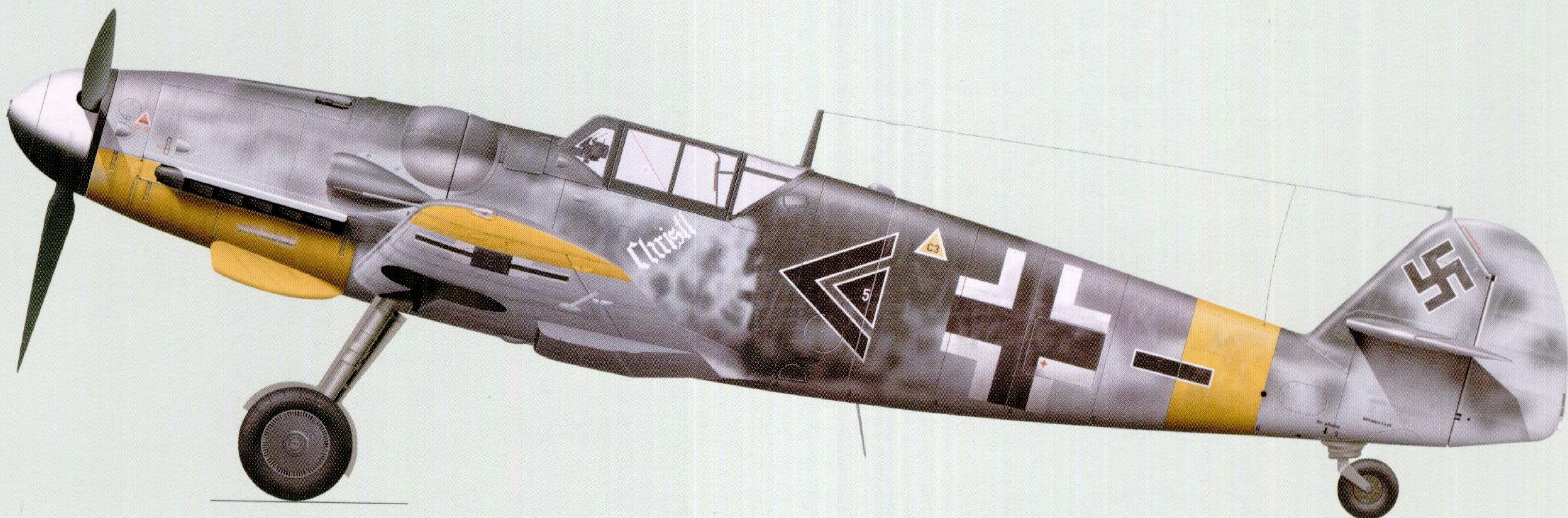
On 23 January 1944, and with a tally of 238 victories, Barkhorn completed his 1,000th war flight. Soon afterwards, on 13 February, he became the second pilot after JG 54's Walter Nowotny to reach 250 victories, for which he was awarded the Swords on 2 March 1944. These were presented to him by the *Führer* on Obersalzberg, near Berchtesgaden, in April.



LEFT AND ABOVE: Hptm. Günther Barkhorn after returning from his 1,000th war flight on 23 January 1944. The bands on the wreath are marked with the names of the various countries against which the *Gruppe* has fought.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-6 flown by Hptm. Gerhard Barkhorn, Kommandeur of II./JG 52, 23 January 1944

Hptm. Gerhard Barkhorn's machine was finished in a standard 74/75/76 scheme but unlike the similar Bf 109 G-6 flown by this pilot in the late summer of 1943 (see pages 268-269, Volume 4, Section 3) this machine has a triangle in place of the inner chevron of the *Kommandeur's* marking. The only other difference, apart from the name of his wife under the cockpit which is angled to touch the canopy sill, is that instead of a spiral, this aircraft had a white segment on the green 70 spinner. On 13 February 1944, Barkhorn scored his 250th victory in this aircraft, although on that occasion it is thought that the aircraft flew with the undercarriage doors removed. It is also possible that this is W.Nr. 163195, the same machine Barkhorn was flying when he was shot down and wounded on 31 May 1944. Note that although Barkhorn's victory tally included a number of Il-2s, the machine is not equipped with underwing MG 151 cannon.



RIGHT: Technical personnel servicing Barkhorn's Bf 109 G-6. Clearly visible on the inner part of the Stab marking is the small number 5, a memento of the Bf 109 F 'White 5' which he flew when with 4./JG 52 at the beginning of the war against Russia. Polishing the windscreen is Barkhorn's chief mechanic Albert Kusterer.

BELOW: Barkhorn photographed in the same aircraft after achieving his 250th victory on 13 February 1944. On this occasion, the victim was a Yak-1 shot down over the Crimea. Barkhorn considered that, provided it was flown by a competent pilot, the best Russian fighter was the Yak-9, of which he destroyed at least 14.



Barkhorn once checked his log book and discovered that the average length of each of his missions was 72 minutes, adding, *"But you could be engaged six or seven times during one of those missions and it was mentally quite exhausting"*. Such was the case on 31 May 1944 when Major Barkhorn flew five missions, during which he accounted for another four Soviet aircraft – two P-39s, an Il-2 and a Yak-9 – to bring his total to 272 victories. He then took off again in the late afternoon on his sixth mission of the day, which involved flying escort for Ju 87s. Having flown that day on average a mission approximately every two hours since around 05.00 that morning, he was mentally and physically exhausted, lacked concentration and, forgetting that a fighter pilot must spend at least two-thirds of his time in the air looking to the rear, failed to keep a proper watch on this area of greatest danger. As a result, he was attacked by a P-39 and seriously wounded by a bullet which passed through his right leg. Fortunately, he succeeded in crash-landing his Bf 109 G-6, W.Nr. 163195, possibly the same machine shown in the profile on page 145, in friendly territory but, as a result of his wound, he was hospitalised and did not return to action until nearly five months later.

During this period of recuperation, and having married Christl, née Tischer, in 1943, Barkhorn was now the father of a daughter, and in September 1944 he was present as a witness at his friend Erich Hartmann's wedding in September 1944, but at the same time he lost his lead as the highest scoring pilot and was overtaken by Hartmann. When he returned to the front at the end of October, Barkhorn realised that the experience of being shot down in a surprise attack from the rear had had a deep psychological effect on him and for some time he maintained an especially close watch behind his aircraft and ordered that even friendly aircraft were never to fly in that position. Nevertheless, he began to add to his tally and on 26 October shot down a Yak-3 as his 273rd victory. He reached 300 victories on 4 January 1945 and the next day shot down his 301st, a LaGG-5, while flying a Bf 109 G-10.

Barkhorn's association with JG 52 ended when he was transferred to JG 6 and, with the rank of Major, he became its *Kommodore* on 15 January 1945. JG 6 was first formed in July 1944 from I. and II. *Gruppen* of the disbanded bomber-destroyer unit ZG 26 and had flown in the defence of the Reich. Although III./JG 6 still flew the Bf 109 G, I. and II./JG 6 were equipped entirely with the Fw 190 and the *Geschwaderstab* flew a mixture of both types. After taking part in Operation

ABOVE: Hptm. Barkhorn after his 250th victory.

BELOW: At Erich Hartmann's wedding, September 1944.





LEFT: Gerhard Barkhorn with Erich Hartmann. Hartmann finished the war as the world's top scorer with 352 victories.

'Bodenplatte', the attack on Allied airfields in the West on 1 January, JG 6 had then moved to the Eastern Front where, like a number of other *Jagdgeschwader*, it was required to fly ground-attack sorties against the Soviet advance.

By the time Barkhorn joined JG 6, the unit had received examples of the latest Fw 190 D-9, but although he flew this variant on occasion, he much preferred the Bf 109 G which he continued to fly. He was, however, still not fully recovered from the effects of the wounds he had received in May 1944 and in March 1945 he was obliged voluntarily to relinquish command of JG 6 in order to seek further medical treatment and convalescence.

Barkhorn was staying at the *Jagdfliegerheim* 'Florida' - the fighter pilots' rest home at Bad Wiessee - when, in March 1945, he received a call from his former *Gruppenkommandeur* in II./JG 52, *Oberst* Johannes Steinhoff, inviting him to join Adolf Galland's Me 262 jet fighter unit, JV 44. Barkhorn agreed, and he arrived at JV 44's base at Munich-Riem on 15 April 1945. Although Galland put Barkhorn in charge of the unit's Si 204 liaison aircraft, he was also supposed to fly missions in the Me 262. Barkhorn, however, encountered problems with the Me 262, developed a dislike for the aircraft and made only two combat flights with it. The second of these - probably on 21 April 1945 - ended badly after he had taken off to intercept a US bomber formation. Just as he was closing in to attack, the starboard Jumo engine of his Me 262 failed, forcing him to break off his action and return to Riem. As he did so, he attracted the attention of several P-51 pilots, believed to be from the US 4th Fighter Group, which were escorting the bombers. With only one engine, however, there was little Barkhorn could do to escape or evade the pursuing P-51s and,



RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT: Major Barkhorn with his Fw 190 D-9 marked with the chevron and horizontal bars of a Geschwaderkommodore, at Welzow, Niederlausitz, in February. Just visible inside the chevron is a small white 5, while the name of Barkhorn's wife, Christl, also in white, appears below the cockpit sill.



chased down to ground level, he chose a small clearing and dived towards it in order to make a wheels-up crash-landing. As the aircraft slid over the ground, Barkhorn opened the canopy and released his straps in order to make a quick exit. The ground, however, was more uneven than he thought and when the machine struck a bump, the sudden deceleration lifted him out of his seat and, as he was thrown forward onto the bridge of the windscreen, the canopy dropped onto his neck and almost decapitated him.¹ Within 24 hours, Barkhorn was back in hospital and was still there when the war ended in May 1945 and he became a PoW.

The Allies, and particularly the Americans, were especially interested in the Me 262 and made a determined attempt to round up as many jet pilots as possible for questioning. Together with other well-known pilots such as Galland, Bär, Krupinski, Herget, Hohagen and Dahl, Barkhorn was located and taken first to Heidelberg and then flown to the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre in Buckinghamshire in the UK for questioning. Some three or four weeks later, after the Americans were satisfied that he had told them all he could about the Me 262, he was put aboard a ship at Southampton bound for Cherbourg and began the long return journey to Germany where he was finally released in September 1945.



ABOVE: An F-84F Thunderstreak of the Bundesluftwaffe's Jagdbombergeschwader 31 'Boelke'. The last example of this type was retired from the Bundesluftwaffe in 1967.



ABOVE: An F 104G Starfighter of Jabo G 31.

Major Barkhorn resumed his military career when he joined the new *Bundesluftwaffe* soon after its establishment on 24 September 1956. He took a jet refresher training course at RAF Valley in Wales and after further jet training in the US, in 1957 he became *Kommodore* of the fighter-bomber unit *Jagdbombergeschwader 31 'Boelke'*. Equipped at first with the F-84F Thunderstreak and, later, the F-104G Starfighter, Barkhorn remained in command until 1962. In 1964, *Oberst* Barkhorn together with *Hptm.* Sühr, another *Bundesluftwaffe* pilot, was posted to Dunsfold and West Raynham in England as a member of the British-US-West German Tripartite team established to evaluate the Hawker Siddeley Kestrel, the revolutionary V/STOL aircraft which was later developed into the Harrier. At that time, the aircraft was directionally unstable and had a tendency to drift to one side while landing with the result that one of the outriggers was frequently damaged. Typically, Barkhorn, who flew 102 Kestrel sorties, always apologised to the civilian ground crews for any such damage sustained when he was at the controls and ex-Dunsfold flight-line employees still especially remember him for his courtesy and quiet consideration. He also damaged one Kestrel in a heavy landing after instrument flying on 13 October 1965. Otherwise, the test programme was relatively free of such incidents. Despite enthusiastic reports, the West German government was politically committed to its own VAK 191 which was eventually cancelled.

After some nine months of intensive flying, the Tripartite Squadron was disbanded and later, on his

RIGHT: The pilots of the Tripartite Evaluation Squadron in 1965. The Squadron's two Bundesluftwaffe pilots, *Oberst* Barkhorn, second from right in the back row, and *Hptm.* Sühr, kneeling first left in the front row, had widely different fighter backgrounds. Sühr had some 900 flying hours but Barkhorn had survived 1,104 operational flights during the Second World War and had already flown all the high performance jet fighters of the day. Barkhorn's conversion to the Kestrel involved ten sorties flown between 15 December 1964 and 14 January 1965 and totalled 3 hrs 32 mins flying time, after which he became one of two deputies assigned to the squadron commander, Wg. Cdr. David Scrimgeour (back row, centre).





ABOVE: With Oberst Barkhorn at the controls, Hawker Kestrel XS 688 flew the Tripartite Evaluation Squadron's final sortie on 30 November 1965.

victories the world's second most successful fighter pilot. He was buried on 14 January 1983 at Tegernsee in Upper Bavaria where his daughters Ursula, Eva and Dorle, plus many of his friends and former colleagues paid their last respects. He will be remembered as an extremely well-adjusted personality; friendly, cultured, well-mannered and with a quiet reserve which made him extremely modest about his extraordinary achievements as a fighter pilot.

1. Published accounts of this event, namely in 'Horrido', by T.J. Constable and R.F. Toliver, and in 'Me 262 Combat Diary' by John Foreman and S.E. Harvey, are erroneous in that the authors state that the canopy slid forward onto Barkhorn's neck, whereas the canopy on the Me 262 opened sideways.

return to Germany, *Oberst* Barkhorn became assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations at the 4th Allied Tactical Air Force at Ramstein. He remained in this position until August 1969 when he became a *Brigadegeneral* and took up a position with NATO in Denmark before returning to 4th ATAF as its Chief of Staff. He left the *Bundesluftwaffe* as a *Generalmajor* in 1976 and thereafter retired to Bavaria where he enjoyed life as a grandfather. Unfortunately, his retirement was to be cut tragically short, for while driving on the autobahn near Cologne in winter weather on 6 January 1983, he was involved in an accident. Christl Barkhorn, died at the scene and Barkhorn himself passed away in hospital two days later.

So ended the life of 63 years old *Generalmajor a.D.* Gerhard Barkhorn, with 301

Mitte in East Prussia by reaching Tolkemit at Frisches Haff. The isolated *Heeresgruppe Mitte* had to focus its forces on the defence of Königsberg in the East and was forced to give up the area around the Masurian Lakes. This symbolic loss caused Hitler to replace *Generaloberst* Reinhardt with *Generaloberst* Rendulic, but *Generaloberst* Robert Ritter von Greim, commander of *Luftflotte 6* in East Prussia and one of the *Führer's* favourites, retained his position. The fighter units and *Schlachtgruppen* under his command lost 215 aircraft and claimed 143 victories during the Battle of East Prussia in January 1945.

On 28 January the Soviets crossed the Oder River north of Breslau at Steinau. Farther south, Marshal Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front advanced into Upper Silesia. Near Breslau on 30 January, *Obstlt.* Hermann Graf's adjutant in *Stab/JG 52*, *Oblt.* Heinrich Füllgrabe, was killed when his Bf 109 was shot down by Soviet ground-fire during a low-level attack against enemy armour. Together with Hermann Graf, Alfred Grislawski and Ernst Süss, Füllgrabe had once been one of 9. *Karayastaffel/JG 52's* famous quartet of aces. He was credited with 67 victories and had been awarded the Knight's Cross.

Hptm. Erich Hartmann, who by that time had increased his victory total to 336 was, in late January 1945, assigned to lead I./JG 53. This *Gruppe* had previously operated on the Western Front and had experienced great difficulties in adapting to the situation on the Eastern Front. It was therefore Hartmann's task to assist the *Gruppe* in this respect but, according to *Hptm.* Helmut Lipfert, it was already in such a bad way that Hartmann "was unable to infuse this *Gruppe* with the right spirit."

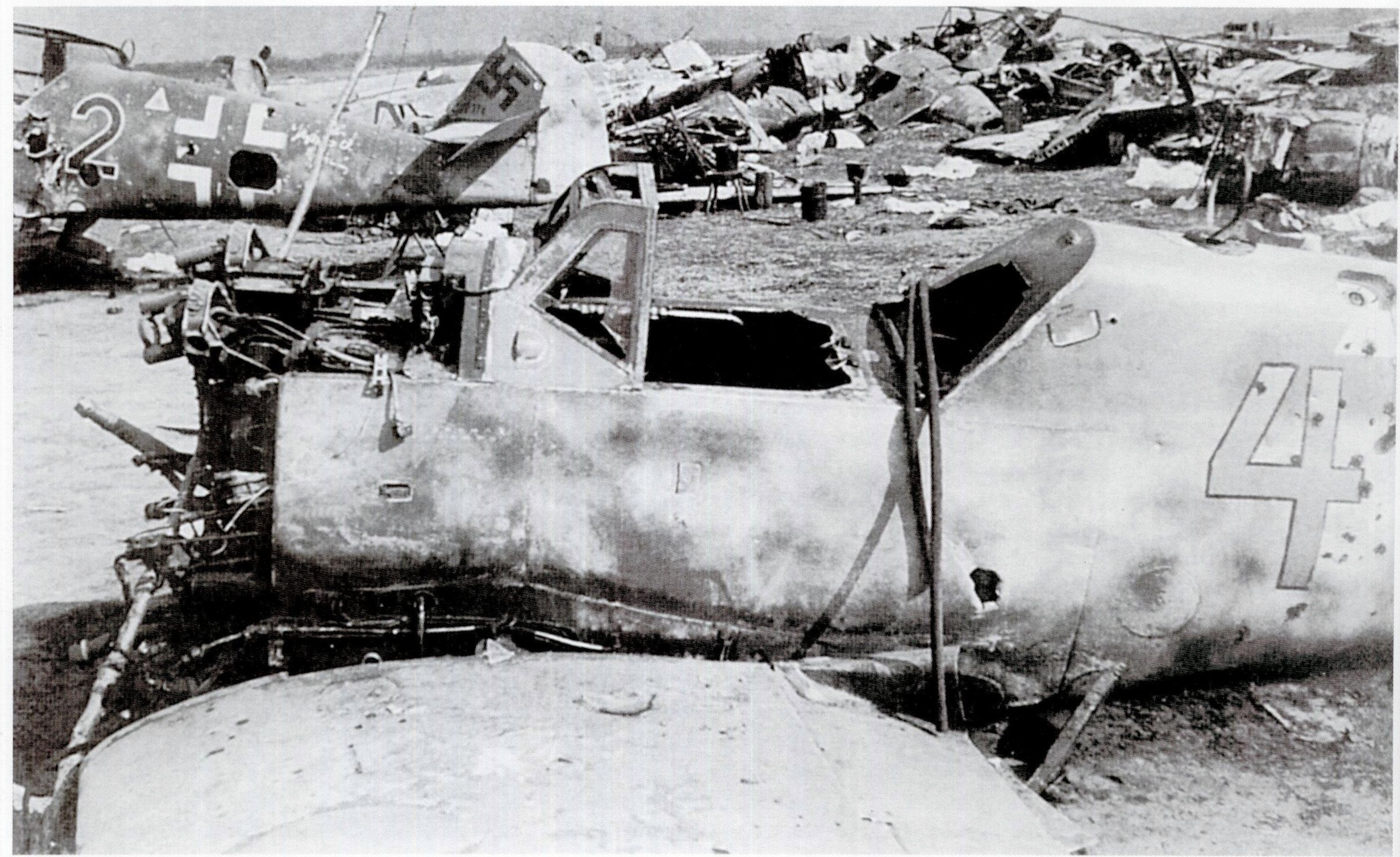
In late January 1945, after an advance by the Soviet Army of between 200 and 400 miles in three weeks, its extended supply lines once again enabled the German armies to check the offensive along the entire front line, aided by the *Luftwaffe* which contributed further by flying 2,500 combat sorties on the two first days of February alone but lost 83 aircraft to ground fire and fighter attack. Between 12 January and 3 February, the Soviets lost 343 aircraft in the Vistula-Oder offensive.

BELOW: In late January 1945, *Hptm.* Erich Hartmann (left) was transferred from JG 52 to I./JG 53 as acting Kommandeur. This *Gruppe* had previously operated on the Western Front, and Hartmann was to help the pilots overcome their difficulties in adapting to conditions on the Eastern Front. He remained in this post until 14 February, when he handed the *Gruppe* over to *Hptm.* Helmut Lipfert (right), who remained in command until the *Gruppe* was disbanded on 17 April 1945. Some of I./JG 53's aircraft were then taken over by JG 52. This photograph was taken at Csór, in western Hungary, in December 1944.



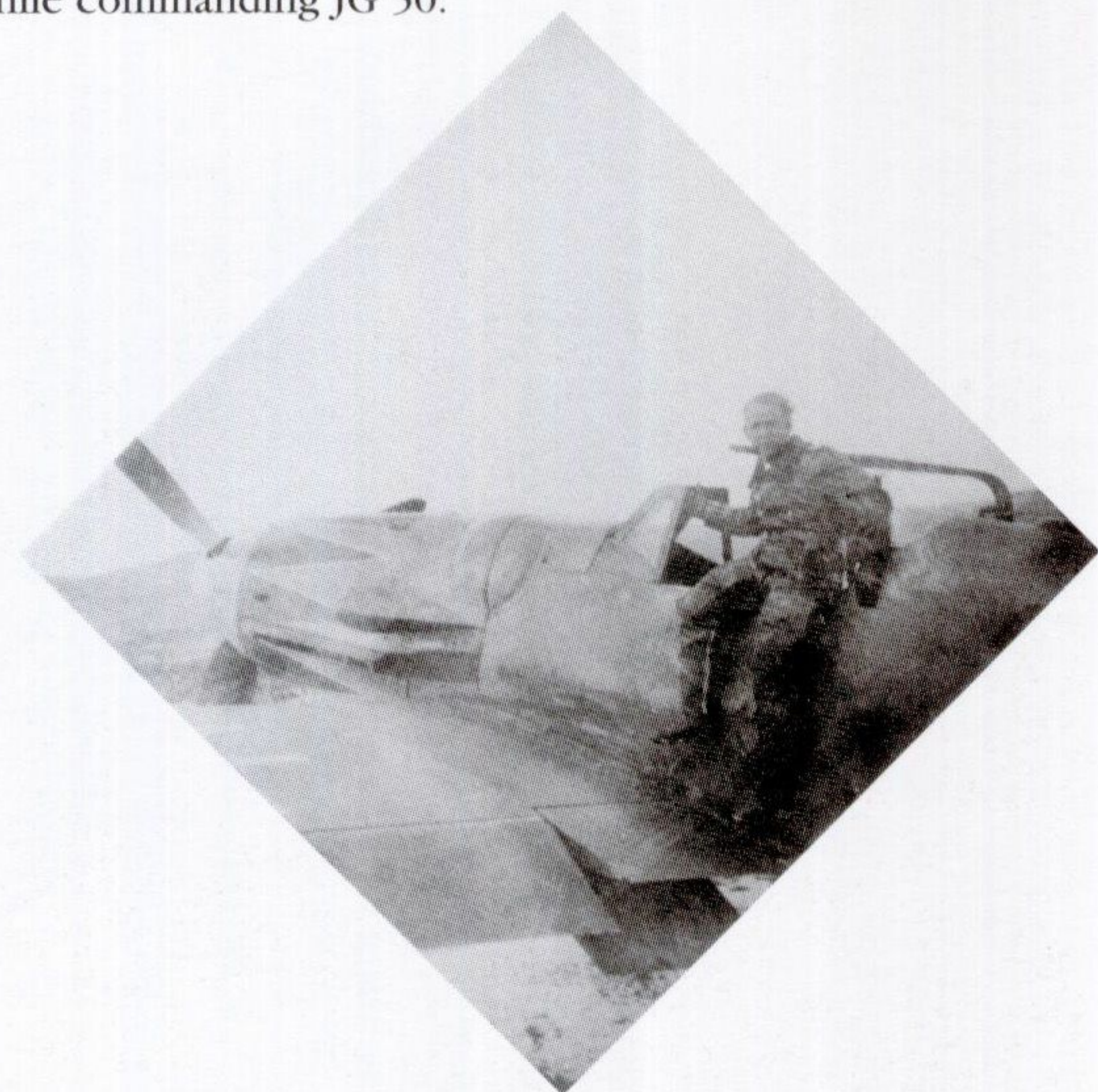


ABOVE AND BELOW: Photographed on a captured airfield by advancing Soviet forces in the spring of 1945, the Bf 109 G-6 with the tactical code 'Yellow 4' in the foreground of both pictures is believed to be W.Nr. 510959. Behind this aircraft are the remains of another G-6 coded 'Black 2'.





LEFT AND BELOW: Uffz. Peter Essen, possibly of Stab/JG 52 with 'Black 2', a Bf 109 G with an Erla canopy and the nose decorated with a red tulip design edged in white. This design was probably introduced by the Geschwader Kommodore, Hermann Graf, who decorated his aircraft in a similar way while commanding JG 50.



Ironically, in early February 1945, even at this late stage of the war, by concentrating most of its units in the East the *Luftwaffe* was able to achieve air superiority and present the enemy with a numerical force that the Western Allies did not match after 1940 and which contained the greatest concentration of *Luftwaffe Experten* of the war. Furthermore, while the *Luftwaffe* operated from well-equipped peacetime airbases with concrete runways and hangars, Soviet aircraft were operating from improvised airstrips close to the front. As the ground thawed, these improvised airstrips turned to mud and brought about a sharp decline in Soviet sorties for, while under normal conditions VVS fighter and ground-attack aircraft at least could operate from grass fields, concrete was required in the thaw. In the first ten days of February, air observation posts of the Soviet 1st Belorussian Front recorded 13,950 flights by the *Luftwaffe* against which 16 VA could carry out only 624 sorties.

In this situation, aerial opposition was relatively limited, but on 4 February the OKW War Diary recorded 14 aircraft shot down on each side. On the 5th, JG 51's *Stabsstaffel* claimed to have shot down seven Soviet aircraft, one of which was registered as *Ofw*. Helmut Schönfelder's 50th victory, and the following day the OKW War Diary recorded six aircraft shot down on each side. However, as the Soviets constructed concrete landing strips or repaired those that the Germans had destroyed, more of their aircraft were put into the air and the situation changed so that by the second ten-day period of February, the VVS had won back air superiority. Thus, on 8 February the OKW War Diary reported 19 German aircraft lost against nine Soviet, and 43 German against eight Soviet aircraft shot down the next day.

On 8 February, too, the 1st Ukrainian Front began an offensive against Lower Silesia from bridgeheads on the Oder and surrounded Breslau. On 10 February Marshal Konstantin Rokossovskiy's 2nd Belorussian Front resumed its offensive toward Pomerania. In this sector, Hitler had formed the new *Heeresgruppe Weichsel*, or Army Group Vistula, and placed *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler as its commander, but this was pushed back into Pomerania by Rokossovskiy's troops.

On 12 February, the OKW War Diary recorded 1,500 sorties flown by Soviet aircraft and 1,133 by German aircraft. On the same day, the Soviet Army seized Budapest, which finally fell after weeks of ferocious fighting reminiscent of Stalingrad two

BELOW: Pilots of JG 51 familiarising themselves with the 8.8 cm Raketenpanzerbüchse 54, a shoulder-fired anti-tank weapon which first appeared in 1943 and had a range of about 150 metres. The large, square shield was to protect the operator from the rocket exhaust as the projectile left the barrel. Also known as *Panzerschreck* and based on the original RPzB 43, the RPzB 54 was popular with the troops and remained in service in large numbers until the end of the war. A variant of the projectile was later adapted for use by anti-tank Fw 190s, although in that case the rockets were launched from multiple rails mounted under the aircraft's wing rather than from the launch tube shown here.





LEFT: A Soviet horse-drawn unit in Leipzig in 1945. The city fell to the American First Army in early 1945 but was later handed over to the Russians in accordance with the agreement on the partitioning and occupation of Germany made at the Yalta conference in February 1945.

years earlier and, in the air, cost the Soviets the loss of 293 aircraft between 29 October 1944 and 13 February 1945, on which latter date, according to German sources, 25 *Luftwaffe* and 12 VVS aircraft were shot down. The next day the *Luftwaffe* lost 21 aircraft shot down while achieving no more than five victories.

On 16 February the Germans launched a counter-offensive from Arnswalde toward the south. Supporting this offensive, I./JG 51's *Oblt.* Günther Josten shot down five Il-2s, thus achieving his 150th victory, but the counter-attack was beaten back by the Soviets.

Meanwhile, in the Courland sector, JG 54's most successful fighter pilot, *Oblt.* Otto Kittel, now with 267 victories to his credit, was shot down during an air combat on the 16th and killed. The fact that JG 54's *Lt.* Gerhard Thyben achieved his 150th victory on 17 February was poor consolation. On the latter date, IV./JG 51 also lost *Uffz.* Hans Keller, a pilot with 24 victories.

Operating over East Prussia, III./JG 51 scored six victories on 18 February, including four by *Hptm.* Joachim Brendel. Meanwhile, combined combat losses by III. and IV./JG 51 amounted to four pilots, one being *Fhj.Uffz.* Johannes Keller with 24 victories, and on 19 February, 10./JG 51 lost its *Staffelkapitän*, *Lt.* Heinz Steinicke.



LEFT: Hptm. Helmut Wettstein, Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 54, with his Fw 190 'White 1' in the Courland pocket. Note the black outline style Balkenkreuz on the fuselage and blown canopy which made it possible to install the type of head armour shown.

BELOW: Ground crew of 6./JG 54 at Libau removing the covers from an Fw 190 after a fall of snow, January 1945.





LEFT: Uffz. Gölt (second right) of 6./JG 54 with Fw 190 A-8, W.Nr. 738294 at Libau in February 1945. This pilot's last flight of the war was on 8 May when the final unconditional surrender of the Wehrmacht came into effect and he flew from Courland to Flensburg where he surrendered to British forces.

During the first weeks of the Soviet offensive, the German fighters carried out very many low-level attacks against Soviet troops, but from 20 February onwards, in response to mounting Soviet pressure, all *Jagdgeschwader* in the East were ordered to concentrate on *freie Jagd* missions. As if to mark the event, I./JG 52's *Oblt.* Anton Resch shot down four Soviet aircraft over Silesia on the 20th. Similarly, the tenacity with which many Germans fought at this stage of the war is illustrated by I./JG 3 which was credited on 3 March with a total of six victories against seven combat losses, one of which was *Lt.* Walter Brandt. On that day, according to a German report, Brandt, despite having one artificial leg, destroyed three Soviet tanks in fighter-bomber attacks, shot up 20 lorries, and knocked down three Soviet aircraft to bring his total of air victories to 42 before he was himself shot down and injured in the subsequent crash-landing.

On 5 March, II./JG 3 lost four pilots during missions in the Pomeranian battle zone. That day, too, I./JG 54's *Lt.* Ulrich Wernitz claimed to have shot down eight Soviet aircraft over Courland and until 11 March when, another thaw compelled the Soviets to discontinue their attacks, the Germans claimed 178 Soviet aircraft shot down in the fifth Courland Battle.

Adding to the difficulties experienced by the hard-pressed *Jagdgruppen* at this time was an increasingly desperate fuel shortage which brought a further decline in the ability of the *Luftwaffe*'s day fighters to continue operating at full strength. This eventually became so severe that on 4 March OKW was compelled to issue an order prohibiting fighter operations against the USAAF and RAF heavy bombers which, in future, were to be attacked only by jet aircraft.

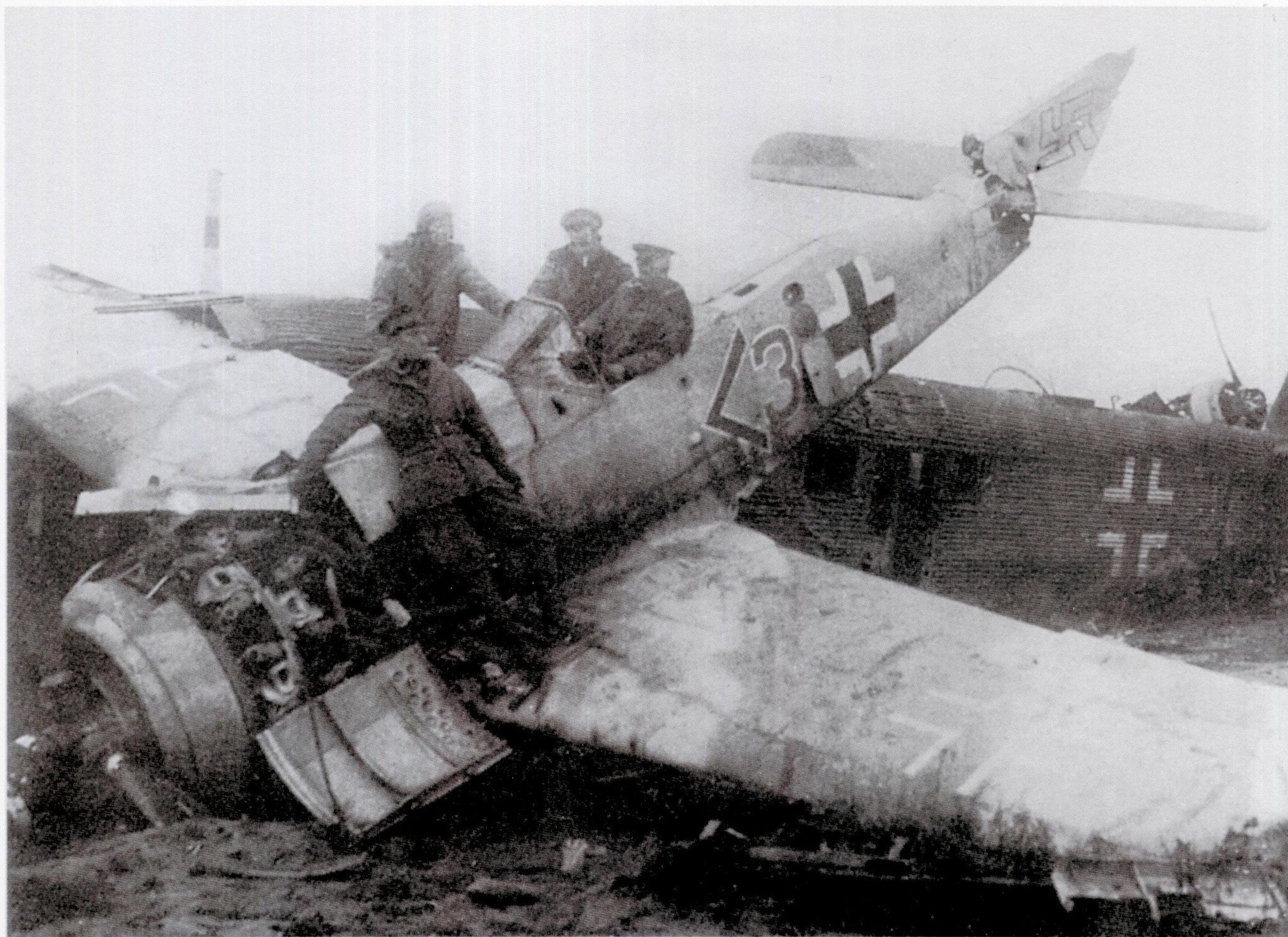
Thus, with the exception of a few piston-engined aircraft which continued to operate in the West, virtually the whole *Luftwaffe* was formally transferred to operate on the Eastern Front, a measure which, with the remaining reserves of fuel, allowed the daily sortie rate to increase from 285 and a maximum of 621 during the first week of March to 1,718 on the 9th.

The Soviet advance, however, could no longer be blocked by air attack and the Soviets occupied Pomerania and isolated the coastal city of Kolberg, which was eventually seized on 18 March. In the battles over East Prussia that day, III./JG 51's *Hptm.* Joachim Brendel claimed to have shot down three Soviet aircraft, one of which may have been flown by *Podpolkovnik* Petr Kozachenko, a pilot of 163 IAP with 12 victories, who was killed. In return, 10./JG 51 again lost its latest *Staffelkapitän*, *Lt.* Karl Urselmann.

On 18 March the 1st Baltic Front opened its sixth attempt to take the Courland pocket, but by early April, when it became clear that this also had failed, *Luftflotte* 1 had claimed another 27 Soviet aircraft shot down. Over East Prussia, III./JG 51 claimed to have shot down eight Soviet aircraft on 22 March and on the 25th, *Oblt.* Bernhard Vechtel of IV./JG 51 attained his 100th victory. In Courland, I./JG 54's *Lt.* Ulrich Wernitz accounted for his 100th victory on the 26th while the next day, *Stab*/JG 51 reported having shot down seven Soviet bombers. In total, between 13 January and the end of March, JG 51's *Stabsstaffel* was credited with at least 45 victories over East Prussia but in the same period this single *Staffel* sustained seven pilots killed.



ABOVE: On 11 March 1945, IV./JG 51's *Oblt.* Peter Kalden was shot down and killed attacking Soviet tanks near Danzig. The city fell to the victorious Red Army on 30 March.



ABOVE: An interesting photograph of Soviet service personnel examining a wrecked Fw 190 F-8, probably in early 1945. The uppersurface camouflage colours are very faded 74 and 75 and indicate that this machine had seen some length of service. Accordingly, the national insignia on the wings and fuselage sides are in the mid-war style, whereas the replacement tail has a simplified, outline style, Hakenkreuz. The fuselage markings suggest the Stab of I. Gruppe, but unfortunately, the Geschwader to which this machine belonged is not known



Focke-Wulf Fw 190 F-8 'Chevron 3' of an unknown unit, early 1945

As noted above, the uppersurface camouflage colours on this aircraft are a very faded 74 and 75. The machine has obviously been fitted with a new tail unit and areas of red primer on the rear fuselage show where panel joint lines have been filled. Similar red primer under the windscreen suggests that this machine may have been a different sub-type before being rebuilt as an F-8, at which time bomb-release equipment and a blown canopy would have been added.

The Last Counter-Attacks

With their cities crumbling under the weight of Allied bombing, transport systems and production centres being systematically destroyed, an increasingly difficult raw material situation, a mounting death toll and despite being pressed from east and west by superior enemy forces already inside the German border, the Germans displayed a remarkable stamina and continued to fight back with all available means, especially in the East where, at Küstrin, the feared Bolsheviks were only some 40 miles from Berlin. On 6 March, the German 6. SS *Panzerarmee*, led by SS-Obergruppenführer Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich, counter-attacked with strong aerial support against the 3rd Ukrainian Front between lakes Balaton and Velenczei in Hungary. On the 7th, the Germans counter-attacked at Ratibor close to the Czech border in Silesia, where the Soviets had established a bridgehead across the Oder river.

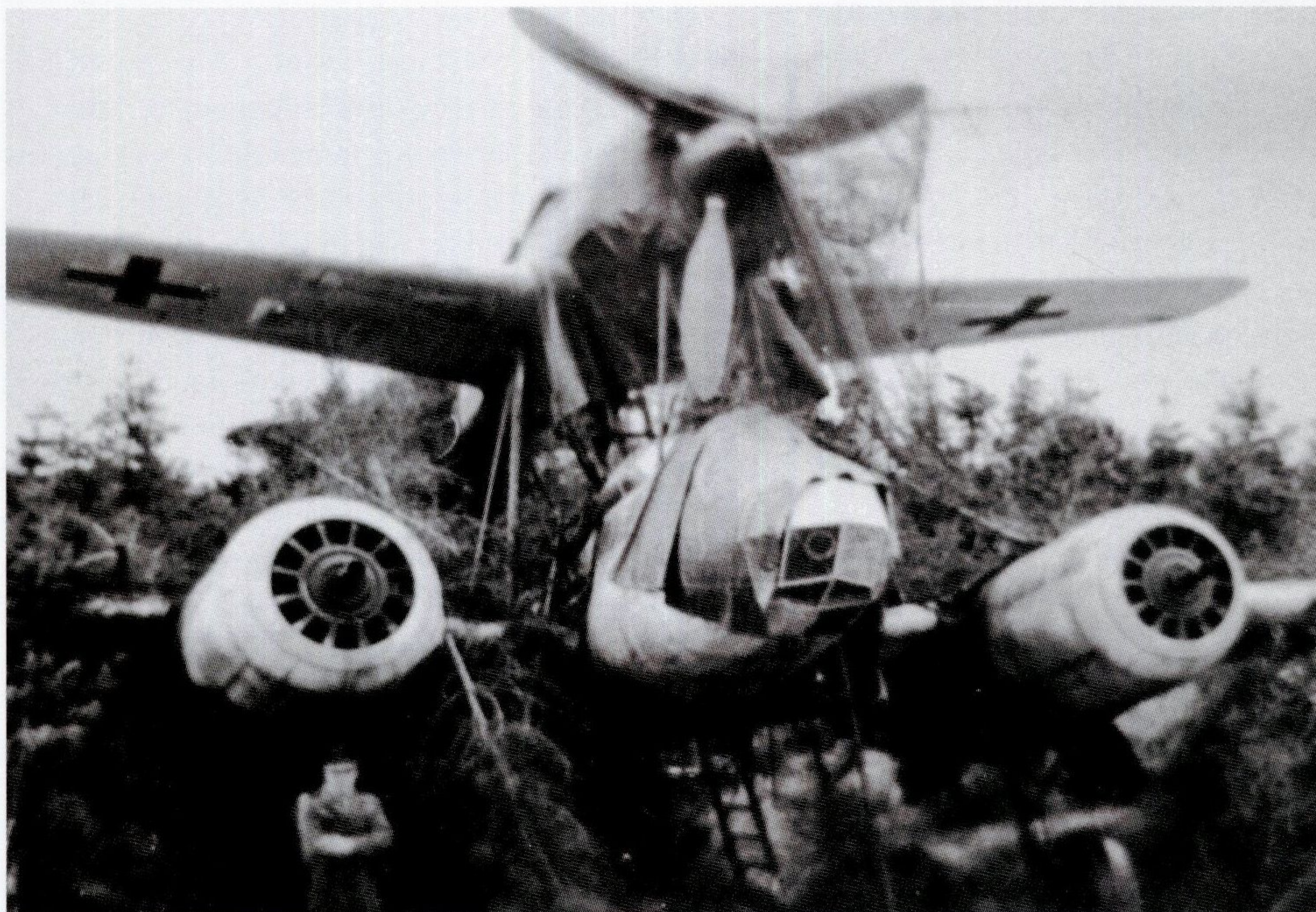
On this day, too, Major Erich Leie, the *Kommodore* of JG 77, now with 119 victories, took off leading five other Bf 109s. First, the six German fighter pilots attacked a single Il-2 escorted by two La-5s, one of which was shot down by Leie. Half an hour later, the same German formation ran into a group of Yak-9s, and in the ensuing combat Leie managed to score a decisive hit on one of the VVS fighters but failed to break off in time and collided with his victim. Leie remained in his Bf 109 G-14/AS, 'Black Chevron 1' during its final descent and crashed to his death. Leie, who had been nominated for the *Eichenlaube*, was credited with a total of 121 confirmed victories, 31 of which were Il-2s, achieved in over 500 combat sorties. Further missions in the same area on 11 March cost III./JG 77 the loss of five Bf 109 K-4s without any victories.

On 16 March the 3rd Ukrainian Front counter-attacked against the flank of Dietrich's *Panzerarmee* and the offensive, which had begun badly and was hampered by soft ground and bad weather, ground to a halt and its troops were forced to retreat. On 25 March, Marshal Malinovskii's 2nd Ukrainian Front, operating north of the Donau, joined the offensive in Hungary by attacking toward the west and by 4 April had taken Bratislava. Two days later the Soviets entered Vienna.

Operating from Fels am Wagram near Vienna, I./JG 53's *Gruppenkommandeur*, Hptm. Helmut Lipfert, scored his 200th victory against an La-5 on 8 April, shortly before the *Gruppe* was disbanded. The following day however, Lt. Friedrich Haas of II./JG 52, with 74 victories, was killed when he was shot down over Vienna by a Soviet fighter. Another of JG 52's successful pilots, Lt. Gerhard Hoffmann with 130 victories, was killed in action near Breslau on 11 April. While the last battles raged in Vienna on 13 April, II./JG 52's Lt. Peter Düttmann attained his 150th victory.

LEFT: An Fw 190 of SG 2 taking off in Hungary, early 1945. Aircraft of Hptm. Rudolf Mrkva's I./SG 2 were sometimes escorted by the Bf 109 Gs of Hptm. Helmut Lipfert's I./JG 53 until, returning from one mission, Lipfert made the interesting discovery that the ground-attack Fw 190s were faster than the Bf 109s. With this fact in mind, and also the Fw 190s superior firepower and diving speed, Lipfert and Mrkva agreed that the fighter escort could in future be dispensed with. The escort was indeed superfluous, for the whole concept of employing the Fw 190 as a fighter-bomber was based in the fact that, once it had released its bomb, or bombs, it could defend itself.





ABOVE AND LEFT: In an attempt to halt the Soviet advance on Berlin, a number of Fw 190s were used in the Mistel concept when they were mounted above bomber aircraft which carried a massive warhead in the nose. The Fw 190 pilot then took off and controlled the composite until near the target when the bomber was aimed at the bridges and released. On 1 March 1945, the Kommodore of KG 200, Oberstleutnant Werner Baumbach (**ABOVE**), was appointed 'Plenipotentiary for Operations against the Oder and Neisse Bridgeheads'. Operations were flown against bridge targets over these rivers and also over the Vistula, but met with little success. The example shown (**LEFT**) belonged to KG 200 but was captured intact at Kastrup in Denmark in May 1945

The Final Battle

The aerial activity during March seriously depleted the already diminishing German supplies of aviation fuel and *General* Karl Koller, the *Luftwaffe* Chief in Staff, was obliged to impose restrictions and reserve the remaining stocks for use only in operations allocated the highest priority. These included air supply missions to the surrounded city of Breslau, attacks against the Soviet bridgeheads on the River Oder, attacks against the Vistula bridges, and attacks on any railways in Poland which were important Soviet supply lines. Even with these operations, however, fuel supplies were still being consumed at a greater rate than they could be replenished so that by early April, when more than 3,000 *Luftwaffe* combat aircraft were concentrated on the Eastern Front, the extent of the fuel crisis was such that there was only fuel for a tenth of that number, the majority being grounded. Given this situation, six *Jagdgruppen* in *Luftflotte* 6 – I./JG 3, I./JG 4, III./JG 6, II./JG 51, I./JG 53, and III./JG 77 – were disbanded. The pilots were divided into three categories, A, B and C. The A and B pilots were transferred to other day fighter units, while the C pilots became ground troops and served with field units or railway Flak.

Following the seizure of Danzig on 30 March, the Soviet forces in East Prussia concentrated against Königsberg, and on 9 April this important city fell into Soviet hands. On 11 April the VVS destroyed a large part of what remained of *Luftflotte* 6 in attacks on the last remaining airfields in East Prussia still in German hands. Following these attacks, III./JG 51 was left with just two aircraft remaining, and on 12 April, the last of these was destroyed in a crash when being flown by *Hptm.* Günther Schack, who survived but with severe burns.

The final offensive against Berlin began on 16 April. Opening with an artillery barrage of unprecedented intensity, *Marshal* Georgi Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front launched a powerful offensive from its Oder bridgehead at Küstrin while *Marshal* Ivan Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front opened a co-ordinated offensive on the lower Neisse. Despite the enormous losses already inflicted on the German Army, it was still possible to concentrate one million troops in the defence of the capital, but opposing them was a total of 2.5 million troops in the two Soviet fronts. Both sides allocated very strong air forces for the Battle of Berlin, the *Luftwaffe* concentrating 1,433 aircraft organised into the new *Luftwaffenkommando Nordost*, which were provided with all the available fuel reserves. They were met by 7,500 Soviet aircraft, organised into 2 VA, 4 VA, 16 VA, and 18 VA. The *Luftwaffe* made one final show of strength during the Battle of Berlin, and some very large air battles took place over the city. On the first day of the offensive alone, the *Luftwaffe* conducted 891 combat missions, around 60 of which were 'total missions', a euphemism for suicide missions, in which pilots crashed aircraft loaded with explosives onto the Oder bridges. While these men sacrificed their lives, others confronted the

Soviet aircraft and claimed to have shot down no less than 125. The VVS actually sustained quite severe losses during these air battles, as did the *Luftwaffe*. On 17 April, the Soviet fighter pilot *Mayor* Ivan Kozhedub of 176 GIAP shot down two Fw 190s with his La-7. As these were his 61st and 62nd victories, Kozhedub acquired the position of the most successful Allied pilot of the Second World War.

On 18 April, another desperate all-out effort by the *Luftwaffe* resulted in more fierce aerial engagements in which the Germans reported no less than 109 victories. On the same day, JG 6 reported 23 victories against the loss of ten Fw 190s and three victory claims against five Fw 190s lost the next day. On 20 April the 1st Belorussian Front managed to break through the tenaciously defended Oder defence line. During one of the air combats that day a whole *Schwarm* commanded by IV./JG 3's Fw. Willi Maximowitz (27 victories) was shot down by Soviet fighters.

On 21 April, the Soviets seized the OKH headquarters at Zossen and began to encircle Berlin. On the 23rd, totally misinterpreting the situation, the *Luftwaffe*'s C-in-C, *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring declared that he was the new *Führer*. Hitler immediately ordered Göring's arrest, promoted *Generaloberst* Robert Ritter von Greim to *Generalfeldmarschall*, appointed him as the *Luftwaffe*'s new C-in-C and ordered him to the *Reichschancellery* in a now virtually surrounded Berlin. Accompanied by the famous female test pilot Hanna Reitsch piloting a Fieseler *Storch*, Greim was wounded by an armour-piercing bullet which struck his right foot during the landing in Tiergarten/Berlin and the aircraft was only prevented from crashing by the prompt action of Reitsch.

IV./JG 3 was dealt another setback on 24 April, when the *Gruppenkommandeur Oblt.* Oskar Romm (92 victories) was shot down and severely wounded. Romm was succeeded by *Hptm.* Gerhard Koall, a Knight's Cross holder and veteran who had been in unbroken first-line service since early 1941. Koall, however, would not even last three days in this position. These air battles during the final weeks were extremely hard and the Soviets acknowledged the loss of 3,173 aircraft in the offensives against East Prussia, Pomerania and Austria alone between 13 January and 25 April.

One of the last great *Luftwaffe* pilots of the war was *Oblt.* Günther Josten, who was appointed IV./JG 51's *Gruppenkommandeur* on 18 April 1945. On 25 April, Josten increased his total tally to 178 by shooting down seven Soviet aircraft and, equipped with various Fw 190 As and Fw 190 D-9s, IV./JG 51 attained 115 victories during the last three weeks of April. *Fhj.Ofw.* Heinz Marquardt, one of Josten's best pilots, increased his tally from 100 to 121 between 14 April and 1 May 1945.



ABOVE: On 12 April 1945, Eichenlaubträger Hptm. Günther Schack, Gruppenkommandeur of I./JG 51, was shot down in flames and reportedly seriously burned, but when I./JG 51 was disbanded on 23 April 1945, Schack was nevertheless appointed Gruppenkommandeur of IV./JG 3 on 1 May, a command he held for just seven days until the war ended on the 8th. With a final score of 174 victories, all claimed on the Russian Front, Schack survived the war despite baling out or crash-landing 15 times, once after a mid-air collision.



RIGHT: By April 1945, on explicit orders from the Führer, German forces in the West had turned their backs on the Americans in order to devote their entire attention to the Eastern Front. Thus, fighter units in the West, where many had already been fitted with bomb racks to compensate for the lack of dedicated ground-attack units in that theatre, were transferred to the Eastern Front. This photograph of an Fw 190 D-9 taking off with a bomb has often been associated with 'Bodenplatte', but this is probably incorrect and it is believed to show an aircraft operating in the East of II./JG 6.



ABOVE AND BELOW: This Fw 190 F-8 with the tactical number 'Yellow 14' and with a yellow II. Gruppe bar landed at Frankfurt Rhein-Main on 19 April 1945. The base was then occupied by US forces and under subsequent interrogation, the pilot, Uffz. Gerhardt Kürschner, stated that he belonged to 4./SG 3 and that he had flown three missions that day attacking the Soviet bridgehead on the Oder river. When briefed for a fourth mission, the pilots were informed that when the remaining stock of 60,000 litres of fuel had been consumed, the ground crews would be assigned to the infantry. Kürschner probably feared that the flying personnel would soon follow, so just after taking off he decided to desert. He jettisoned his bomb and flew to Rhein-Main, landing there at 19.00 hrs. The camouflage colours appear to have been 74/75 on the upper surfaces with undersurfaces in 76, although the rear fuselage shows signs of repainting possibly with 83. All markings are the simplified type and the aircraft does not appear to have any yellow theatre markings. The number 340565 painted under the front of the cowling may have been an engine number and the propeller tips each have a white stripe painted near the tip. The spinner was black with a white spiral.





ABOVE: In April 1945, parts of IV./Jagdgeschwader 51 converted to the Fw 190 D-9. One of these aircraft is seen in the background of this photograph showing Lt. Kurt Tanzer, since February 1945 the Staffelkapitän of 13./JG 51 who, as a Feldwebel with 12./JG 51, had earlier been awarded the German Cross in Gold on 24 June 1943 and the Knight's Cross on 5 December 1943. Although his final victory tally is uncertain, he is believed to have been credited with between 128 and 143 victories. Tanzer survived the war and joined the post-war Bundesluftwaffe but lost his life in June 1960 while flying a T-33 jet trainer.

BELOW: Lt. Friedrich Krakowitz (smiling, second left) of 7./JG 51 and Ofw. Helmut Schönfelder, of the Stabsstaffel of JG 51. Schönfelder (centre) is shown here wearing the Ritterkreuz he was awarded on 31 March 1945.



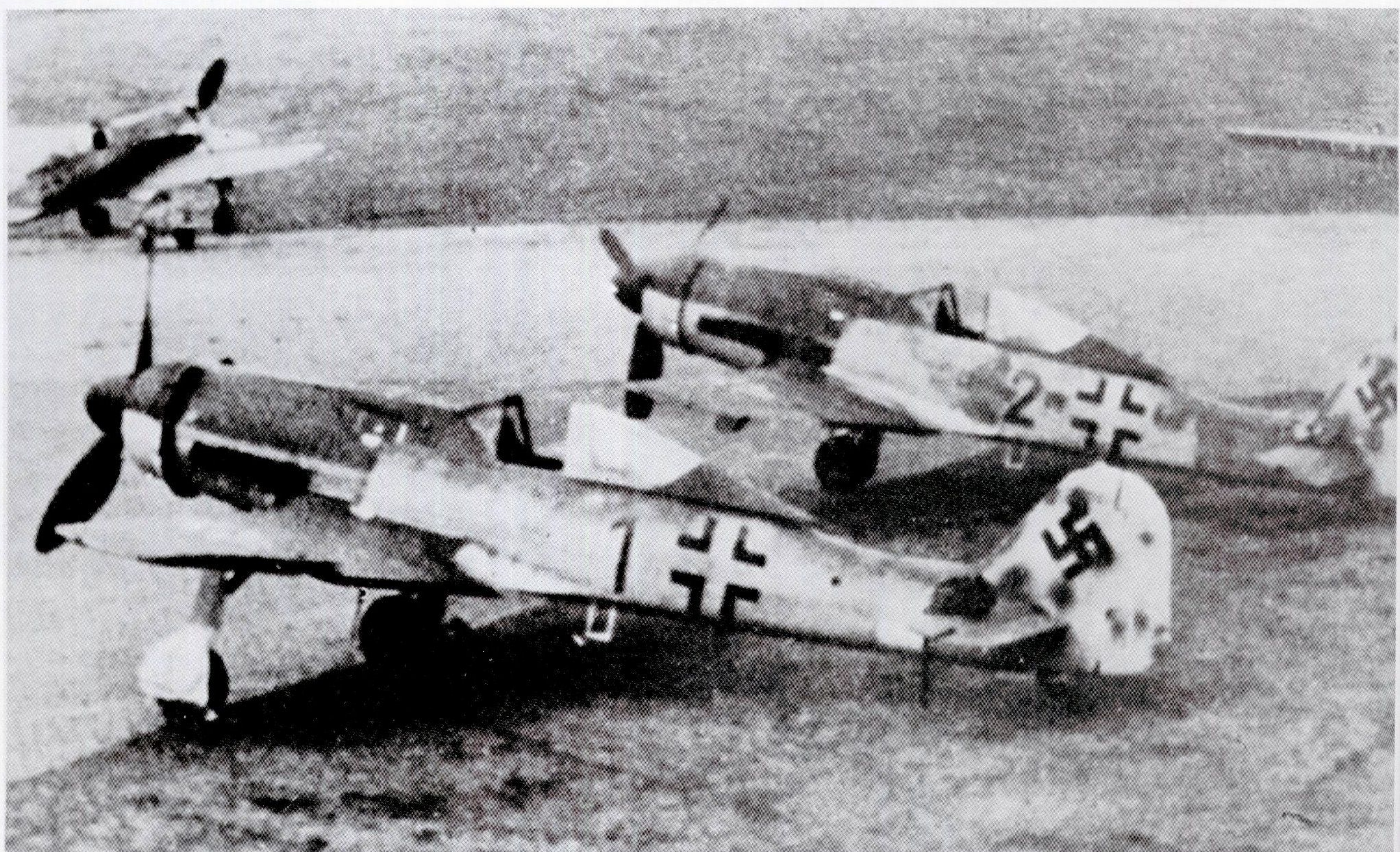
ABOVE: Fhj. Ofw. Heinz Marquardt of IV./JG 51, shown wearing the Knight's Cross awarded on 18 November 1944, accounted for 21 enemy aircraft in the two weeks between 14 April and 1 May 1945 and ended the war with 121 victories.

Marshal Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front began its assault against Berlin itself on 26 April. By now, even the Me 262 jet fighters which had been allocated to operations against the American heavy bombers were transferred to the Eastern Front, and in the evening of 26 April, the Me 262 units JG 7, III./KG(J) 6 and KG(J) 54 despatched a formation of 36 jet fighters against Soviet troops in the Cottbus-Bautzen sector. According to German reports, they succeeded in shooting up 65 Soviet lorries. During the Me 262s' return flight they ran into a group of Il-2s and in the ensuing air battle claimed to have shot down six *Shturmoviks* against two Me 262s lost.

Although very heavy losses were inflicted on the Soviets, all German attempts to stop the advance of the Red Army were in vain and *Luftwaffe* losses were very heavy. In the last *Mistel* attack on the Oder Bridges carried out on 26 April by KG 200, only two Fw 190s of the seven which had taken off returned to base. The next day, II/KG 200 was dissolved and its personnel were incorporated into the ground troops. On 27 April, IV./JG 3's *Hptm.* Koall was shot down and killed during a low-level attack against Soviet troops near Anklam, and what was probably JG 51's last aerial victory against a Soviet aircraft in the war was attained by *Lt.* Alfred Rauch on 29 April 1945. That day the *Luftwaffe* was unable to commit more than 74 aircraft, with a similar number, 76, taking off on the 30th. Meanwhile, the Soviet Air Force carried out an average of 3,600 combat sorties per day between 26 April and 2 May, and in this situation JG 7 lost some ten Me 262s on operations against the Soviets between 28 April and 1 May 1945.

On 30 April, the day Adolf Hitler committed suicide, German forces in Berlin had been isolated in four separate areas and by 2 May, the street fighting in the city was over. Almost half a million German troops were captured during the Battle of Berlin while the Soviets lost 78,291 men killed or missing and 917 aircraft.

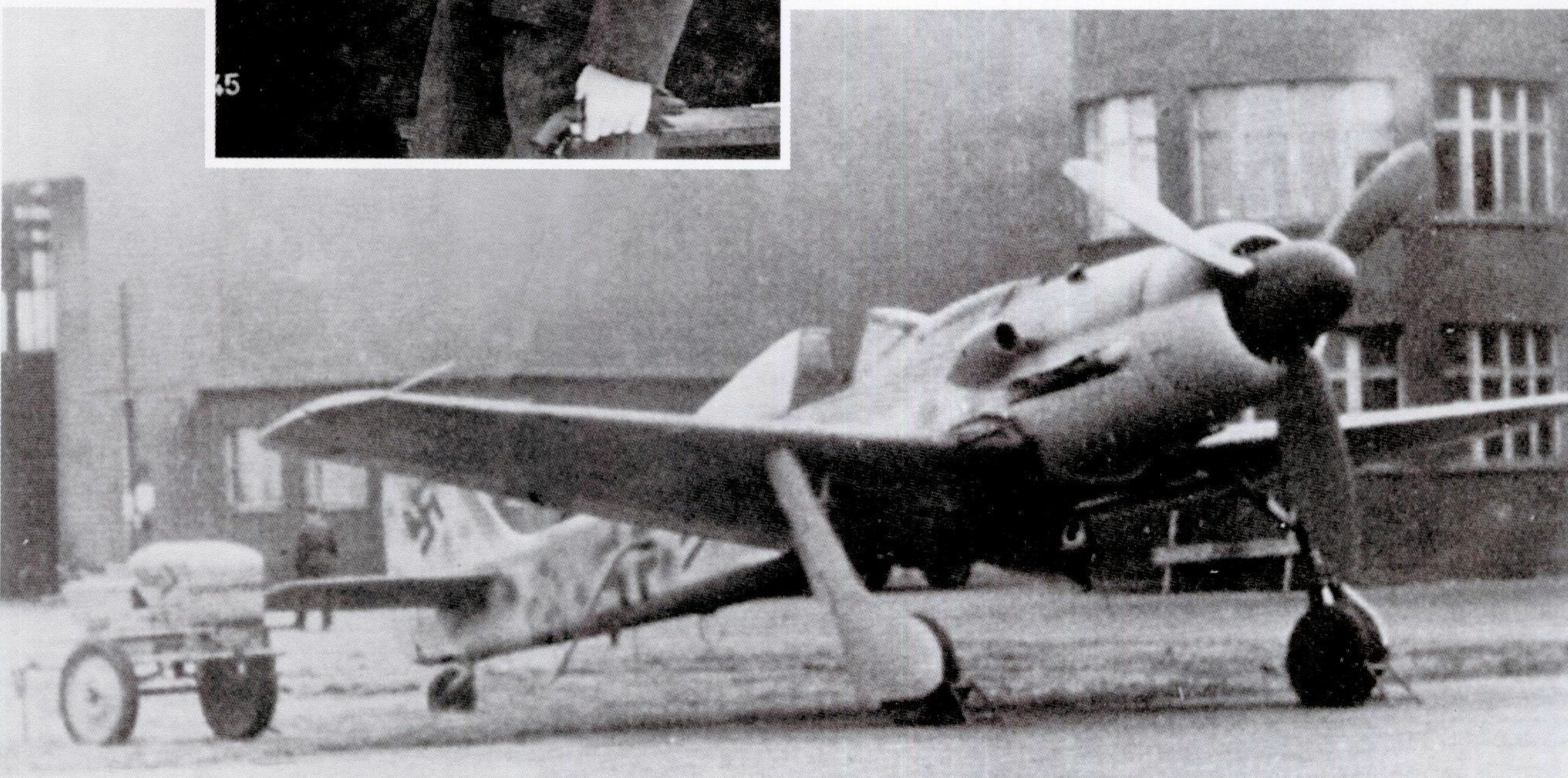
The final battle of the European war was fought over the Czechoslovakian capital of Prague, where more than 600,000 men of German *Heeresgruppe Mitte* continued to resist and the Soviets despatched two million troops and over 3,000 aircraft to crush this last pocket of resistance. Finally it was all over, and on 8 May 1945, JG 52's *Geschwaderkommodore Obstlt.* Hermann Graf ordered *Hptm.* Erich Hartmann to carry out one last reconnaissance flight over Czechoslovakia, perhaps to establish the whereabouts of Soviet troops so that Graf could determine a route by which his men and a large number of dependants, anxious not to fall into Soviet captivity, could be led to the expected safety of the Americans. Hartmann spotted a Yak fighter, attacked, and shot it down. It was filed as the last of his victories, attained during 1,404 combat sorties and 825 aerial combats. The fighting in this region ended only on 10 May 1945, two days after the official German surrender.



RIGHT: In the spring of 1945, a few Fw 190 D-9s were delivered to IV./JG 3 and are believed to have been flown by the Gruppenstab and 14. Staffel. The aircraft shown here were photographed at Prenzlau in March 1945 and are thought to have belonged to Stab IV./JG 3. Note the difference in size between the tactical numbers which may have been green.



LEFT: Oblt. Oskar Romm, the Kommandeur of IV./JG 3. When transferred to the Eastern Front, the Gruppe's task was to fly bombing and strafing attacks against Soviet forces advancing towards Stettin and Berlin. Romm's last combat sortie was flown on 24 April when he took off with a wingman and was about to attack a formation of Il-2s with fighter escort south of Stettin when, due either to enemy fire or a technical failure, the cooling gills on his aircraft opened automatically as a result of the engine overheating. Romm broke off the action by rolling the aircraft onto its back and pulling away in a steep dive, heading westwards at extremely low altitude to avoid the Soviet escort fighters. Recognising German soldiers on the ground and with the left side of his engine now emitting flames, Romm realised he was too low to bale out and made a very heavy crash-landing near Brüssow north-east of Prenzlau in which he fractured his skull, had brain concussion and suffered facial as well as other injuries. His crash was observed by German troops who eventually extricated him from his machine and took him to their command post for medical attention. Meanwhile, Romm's Gruppe had been informed that the Kommandeur had crashed and immediately organised a Kommando under Hptm. Erich Kron to retrieve him. Thus, on the evening of 24 March he was brought back to Prenzlau before being sent on to various hospitals for treatment. He survived the war with the Ritterkreuz and 92 victories.



LEFT: Oblt. Oskar Romm's Fw 190 D-9 at Prenzlau with the double chevron of the Kommandeur just visible on the fuselage. It is not known if this was the machine he was flying when he crashed on 24 April.

RIGHT: Also shown at Prenzlau, this Fw 190 D-9 was marked with the single chevron normally associated with the machine flown by the Gruppe Adjutant. However, as the Adjutant of IV./JG 3 was not a qualified fighter pilot and never flew this aircraft, the marking was used instead to indicate that the machine was Romm's reserve D-9. It was on occasion also flown by Fw. Werner Martin of the Gruppen Stab and Uffz. Karl-Heinz Pütt of 16. Staffel. Indeed, Pütt may have achieved two of his three victories while flying this aircraft.



Summary

Although the major part of aviation literature dealing with the Second World War is, somewhat chauvinistically, focused on the air war between the *Luftwaffe* and its Western adversaries, it is an inescapable fact that the *Luftwaffe*'s main effort was in the East, for during the whole of 1944, the *Luftwaffe* conducted 342,483 combat sorties on the Eastern Front compared with 182,004 against the USAAF and the RAF.

In this same year, the Germans claimed to have destroyed 8,863 Soviet aircraft during 1944, of which 8,501 were credited to the fighter pilots as aerial victories. Although these figures have been doubted by many historians, recent Russian studies show that a total of 10,400 Soviet aircraft were actually lost in combat in 1944.

Be that as it may, the highest numerical losses sustained by the *Luftwaffe* in 1944 were indeed those it suffered against the RAF and, in particular, the USAAF. There are several reasons for this:

- a) The Western Allies enjoyed the advantage of having a secure base in the British Isles from which to launch a strategic air offensive.
- b) Until the last eleven months of the war, the USAAF and RAF had to pay relatively little attention to tactical operations.
- c) The Soviet Air Force, being a tactical force, had to support its own ground troops over enormous areas and concentrate less on the destruction of the *Luftwaffe*. (Nevertheless, a total of 8,600 *Luftwaffe* aircraft was destroyed or damaged on the Eastern Front between September 1943 and October 1944.)

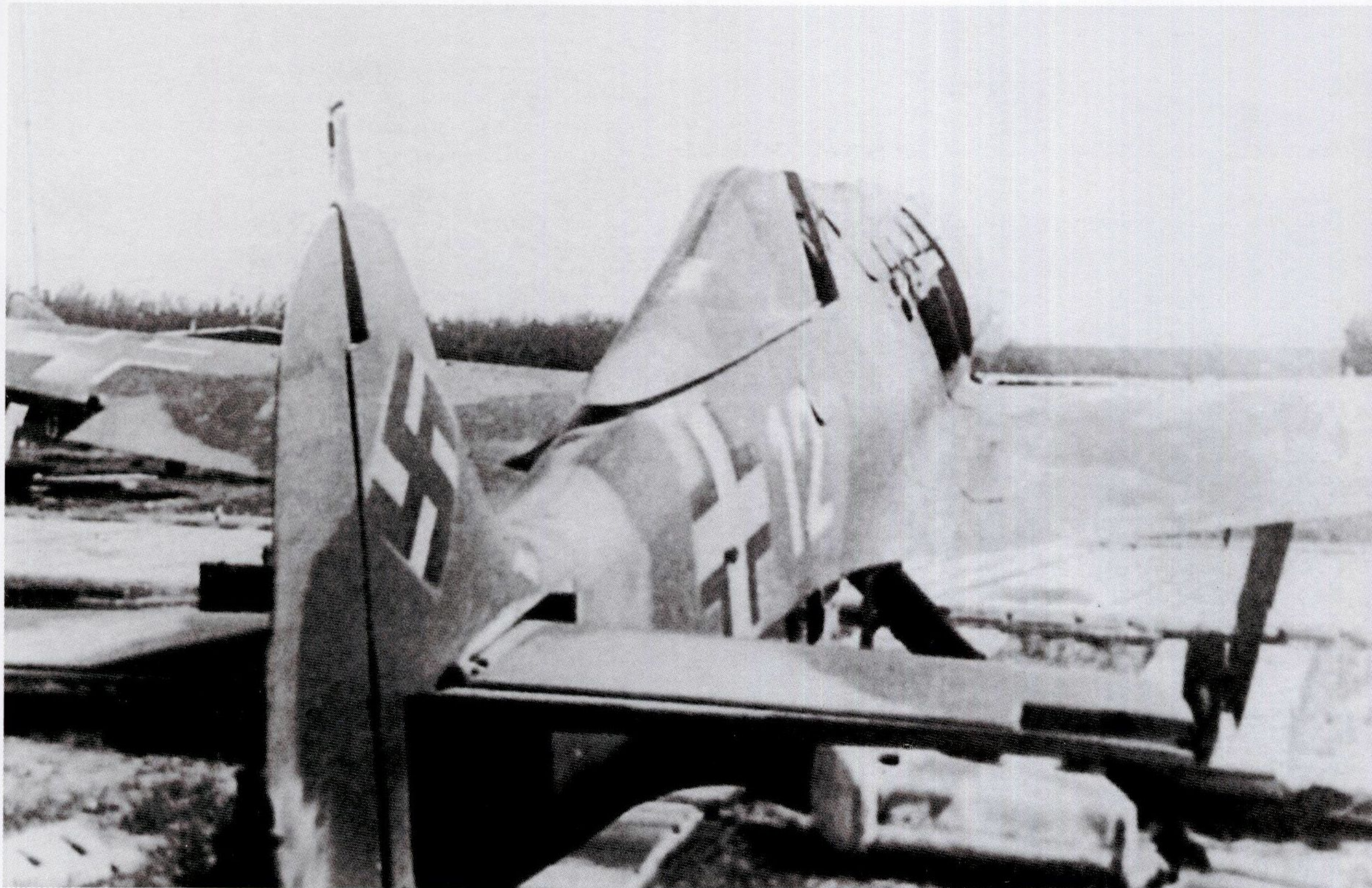
A study of the *Jagdwaaffe*'s war in the East during 1944 and 1945 clearly shows that the Germans lacked resources and, although the Eastern Front was given highest priority, with the exception of 1945, the numerical strength of the German fighter force in the East hardly exceeded some 400 fighters. At the same time, it is also evident that the German commanders employed their limited forces extremely skilfully and by concentrating them in tactically important areas, ground commanders were able to resolve many a local crisis and even achieved successful counter-attacks. Similarly, commanders of flying formations were on several occasions able to achieve local air superiority.

Contrary to the commonly-held opinion that the *Luftwaffe* was ground down to a more or less helpless state until the very last days of the war when the general collapse of supplies, command and control caused a total breakdown, the *Luftwaffe*'s significance on the Eastern Front actually increased, and even in the last half of April 1945, the *Jagdwaaffe* fighter pilots were able to put up one last, brilliant show of defiance and skill when they shot down hundreds of Soviet aircraft during the Battle of Berlin. It should be noted that this was achieved against an air force which, in terms of pilot quality, aircraft quality and tactics, stood at least on equal terms with the USAAF and the RAF.



LEFT: In the last days of the war, and even for a few days after the German surrender, units of the German armed forces did everything possible to rescue trapped military personnel and civilians from the eastern Baltic where Soviet advances had left a series of isolated pockets along the coast. The Kriegsmarine, or German Navy, was especially successful in these humanitarian efforts and finished the war with the enduring gratitude of the German people; but also active were units of the *Luftwaffe*. On 8 May 1945, for example, about 40 machines of KG 26 flew from Gardemoen to Libau in the Courland peninsula to fly out German wounded to Lübeck or Gardemoen before Soviet forces moved in. Each aircraft flew with only two crew members aboard so that up to eight wounded could be accommodated in each aircraft during the return flight. Even the single-seat Fw 190s of JG 54 were used to fly out unit personnel and it is thought that more than 50 Fw 190s flew out of the Pocket on 8 May with some aircraft carrying four passengers squeezed into the rear fuselage area behind the pilot's seat. Seven Fw 190s landed in Sweden, but the majority of aircraft headed for Norway. In this photograph taken on 10 May, a *Luftwaffe* officer is seen after landing at Copenhagen airfield with, on the right of the picture, one of his two passengers. The pilot on the left is believed to be Uffz. Heinrich Asche of 5./JG 54, who also landed with two passengers and the officer in the foreground might be Hptm. Hellmut Wettstein of 6./JG 54. There is, however, some reason to doubt the identity of the latter as no record can be found of Wettstein receiving the German Cross in Gold, the decoration worn on the right of the uniform jacket, nor that he had sufficient victories to justify such an award. Note in the background the paratrooper of the British 6th Airborne Division, a company of which had flown in to Copenhagen on 5 May to help maintain control during the surrender of German forces in Denmark.

Unlike the RAF and the USAAF, which met a resistance that was steadily declining from late 1943 onward, the Soviet Air Force was confronted with a formidable enemy from mid-1941 to the very end. As frequently pointed out in the main text, quite a large proportion of all Soviet aircraft losses during 1944 and 1945 were attributable to a relatively small but immensely experienced core of *Jagdwaaffe Experten*. This group of perhaps only a few dozen fighter pilots was in fact crucial during the war on the Eastern Front, and the longer the struggle continued, the more the importance of their role increased. Moreover, although many of them perished in the bitter conflict against a steadily improving Soviet Air Force, their critical importance actually peaked at the very end of the war.



LEFT: This aircraft was photographed after being abandoned at the end of the war and is a typical example of an airframe reworked as an F-8. The late-war style of national insignia indicate that this was not a particularly old machine, but the original 74 and 75 are nevertheless weathered and have a faded appearance enhanced by the contrasting newly-applied areas of 81 and 83. Note that the 81 and 83, which in this case have been brushed on, have been applied in such a way that the original national insignia were retained and that the original 76 camouflage may be seen surrounding the swastika and within the fuselage Balkenkreuz. Unfortunately, the unit to which this machine belonged is also not known.

Focke-Wulf Fw 190 A-8, unknown unit and location, 1945

This machine is an excellent example of the additional 81 and 83 camouflage applied to reworked Fw 190s and appears to have been applied by brush rather than spraying. Note how the area around the swastika has been avoided and that although the supplementary finish has been carefully painted up to the outside arms of the fuselage and wing Balkenkreuze, the areas adjacent to these markings plainly retain their original faded and weathered grey finish.

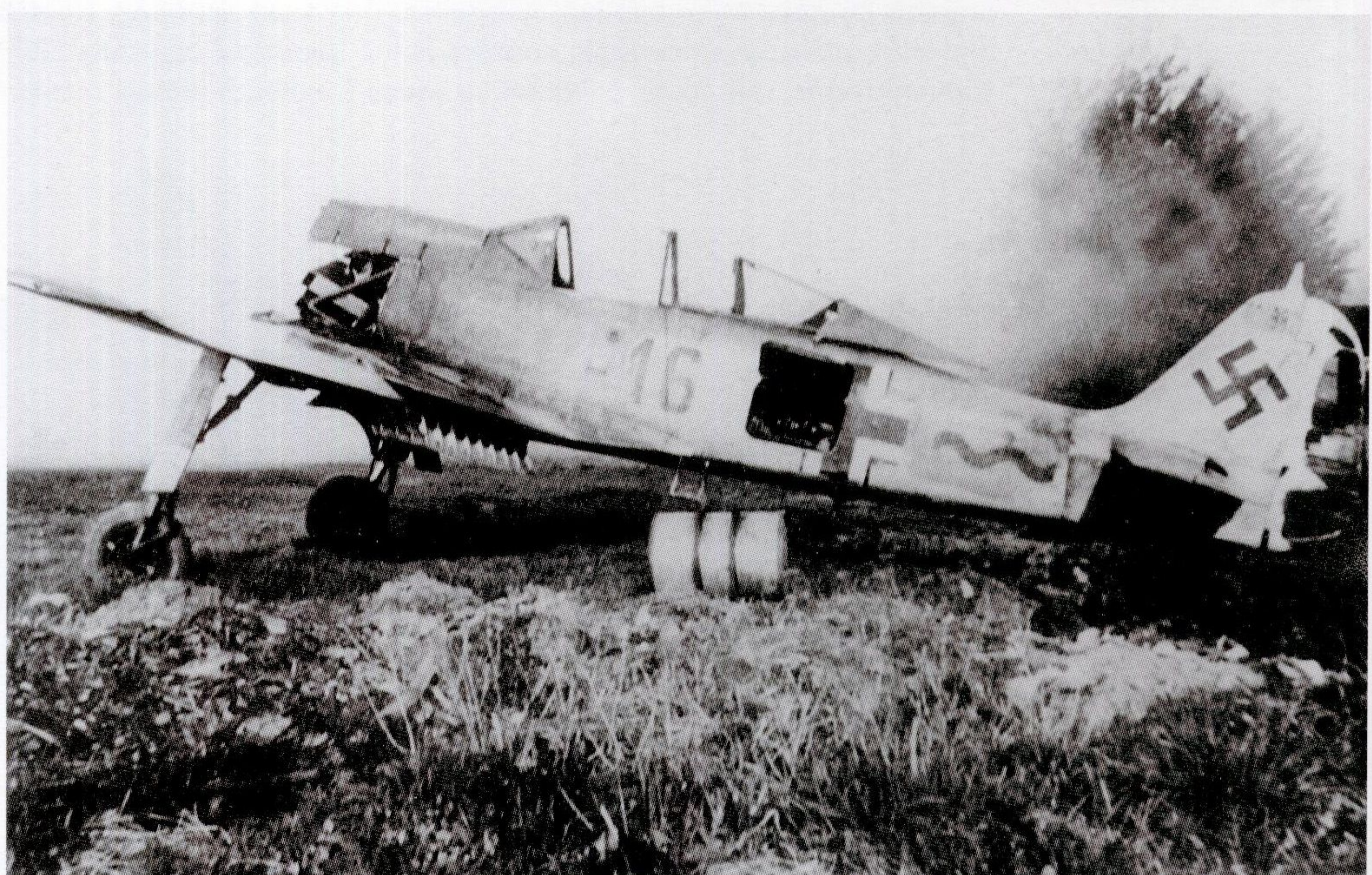




LEFT: This Fw 190 F-8, W.Nr. 584205, belonged to III./SG 3 and had flown operations in the Courland pocket during the closing months of the war. However, on 8 May 1945, three Luftwaffe personnel – Stabsfeldwebel Werner Skirlo, Fw. Johann Gruber and Fw. Adolf Karnel – flew in this aircraft to Sweden where it made a crash-landing at Ållskogsgård. Fortunately, the aircraft was not badly damaged and the occupants survived without injury. The uppersurface camouflage is thought to have originally been the standard 74/75/76 finish, but later the aircraft was partly repainted using an unusual shade of 76 supplemented with large, hard-edged patches of 83 which extended well down the fuselage sides. Undersurfaces were probably the usual blue-grey version of 76 and the wingtips were yellow top and bottom. The tactical letter 'M' was in black, narrowly edged in white, and it is known from Swedish reports that a black vertical III. Gruppe bar, possibly also outlined in white, was positioned behind the fuselage cross. The national insignia included late-war outline style crosses, but the swastika on the tail may have been in the outline style or solid black.



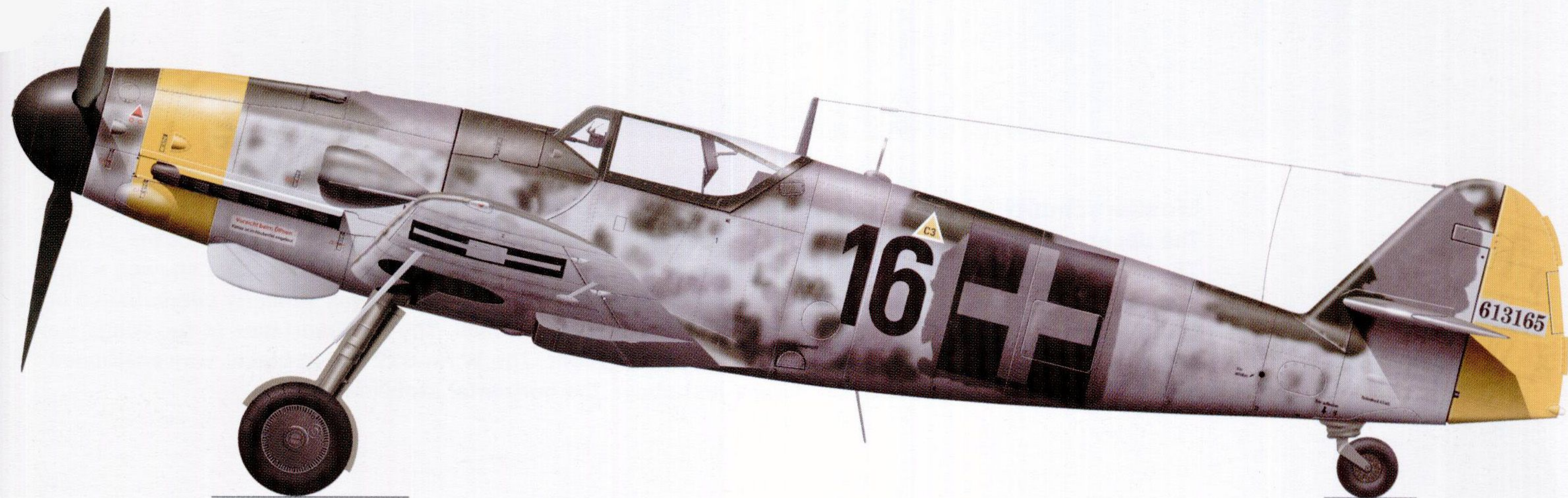
ABOVE: A collection of damaged German aircraft photographed at a repair centre at Berlin-Tempelhof in April 1945, shortly after the airport had been occupied by a fighter squadron of the VVS. The machine in the foreground, 'Blue 17', is an Fw 190 A-8 W.Nr. 170412 which was manufactured exactly a year earlier. Although the unit to which the machine belonged is not known, the unusual style of III. Gruppe bar is interesting. Note the Soviet Yak-9 fighters and the Ju 87 D in the background.



RIGHT: A similar style of III. Gruppe bar is shown on this badly damaged Fw 190 A-8 with the tactical code 'Black 16'. The removal of the lower undercarriage fairings was typical of units operating in muddy conditions on the Eastern Front.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-10 'Black 16' of 101/2, Neubiberg, Germany, 8 May 1945

This Bf 109 G-10 was finished in a 75/83/76 camouflage scheme and had a yellow band around the nose, as applicable to aircraft of Luftflotte 4. The W.Nr. 613165 on the yellow rudder had been masked off and appeared against a background of the uppersurface camouflage colours. The Hungarian national insignia on the fuselage and uppersurface of the wings consisted only of the black parts with the aircraft's camouflage showing through the cross, so it is reasonable to suppose that the underwing crosses were similar.



BELOW: While most of Germany's European wartime allies were content to support the Wehrmacht when Germany seemed to be winning the war, all but one gradually defected when a German victory appeared less certain. The exception was Hungary, whose airmen continued to fight on and at the end of the war, the Hungarian 101 Fighter Wing was at Raffelding in Austria, together with II./JG 52. On 8 May, some 38 or 39 Hungarian and German aircraft flew out from Austria to surrender to US forces at Neubiberg in southern Germany, but all are understood to have been flown by Luftwaffe personnel of II./JG 52. This photograph, actually taken on 12 May, shows 'Black 16' of 101/2, a Bf 109 G-10, W.Nr. 613165, which landed at Neubiberg on 8 May. Other aircraft of II./JG 52 and the Hungarian 101 Fighter Wing may be seen in the background.



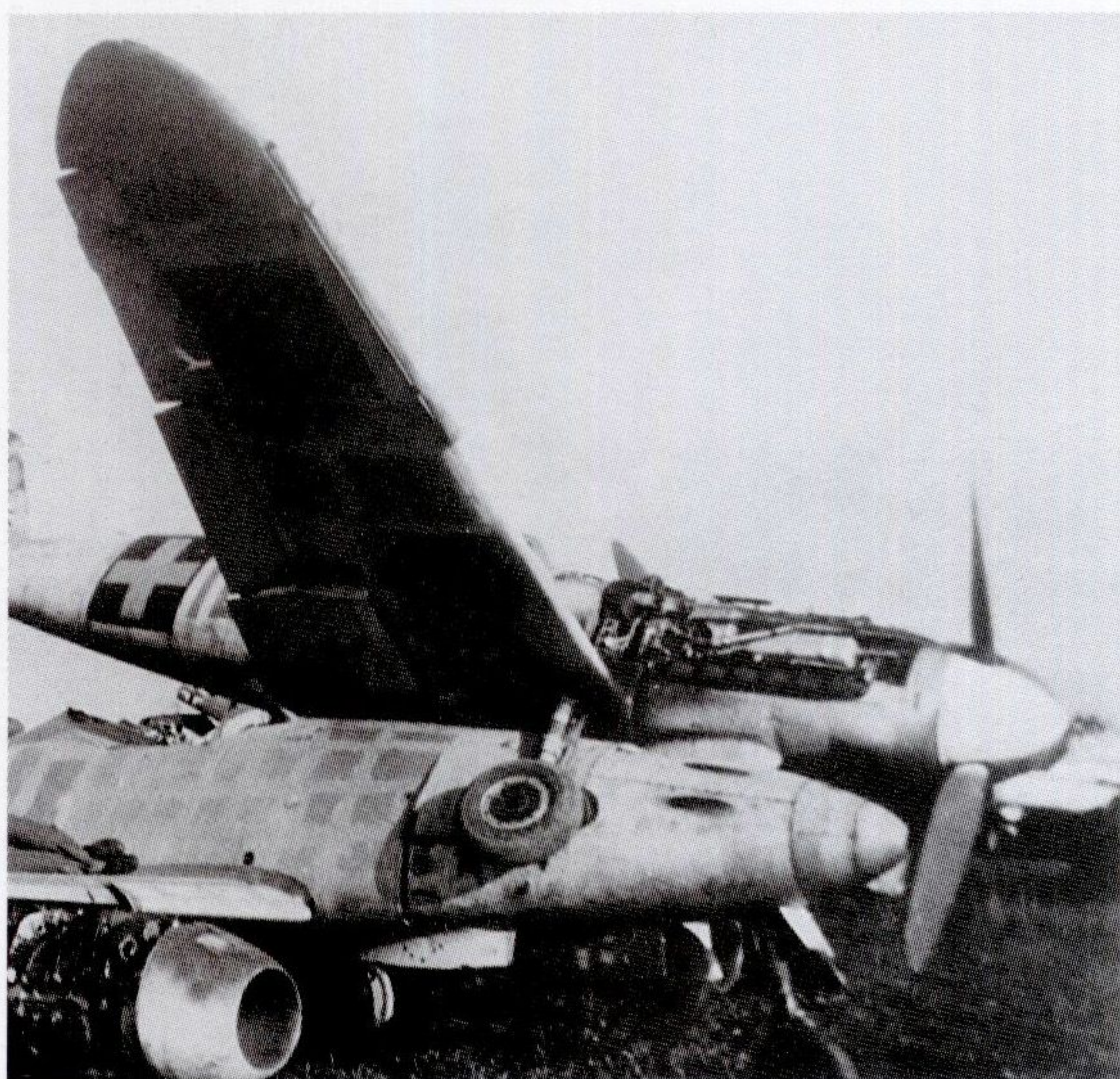


Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-10 'Yellow 12' of 101/3, Neubiberg, May 1945

The uppersurface camouflage scheme on 'Yellow 12' consisted of a late-war combination of the colours 75 and 83 on all uppersurfaces with the exception of the tail, which was 81 and 83 and showed a lighter area on each side where the swastikas had been painted out. The rudder was similarly camouflaged in 81 with hard-edged patches of 83, probably sprayed through a stencil. The undersurfaces of the wings were in 76 and the spinner was green 70 with a white segment. The W.Nr. 612769 in black, was positioned over the rudder and vertical tail surfaces, just above the horizontal stabiliser.

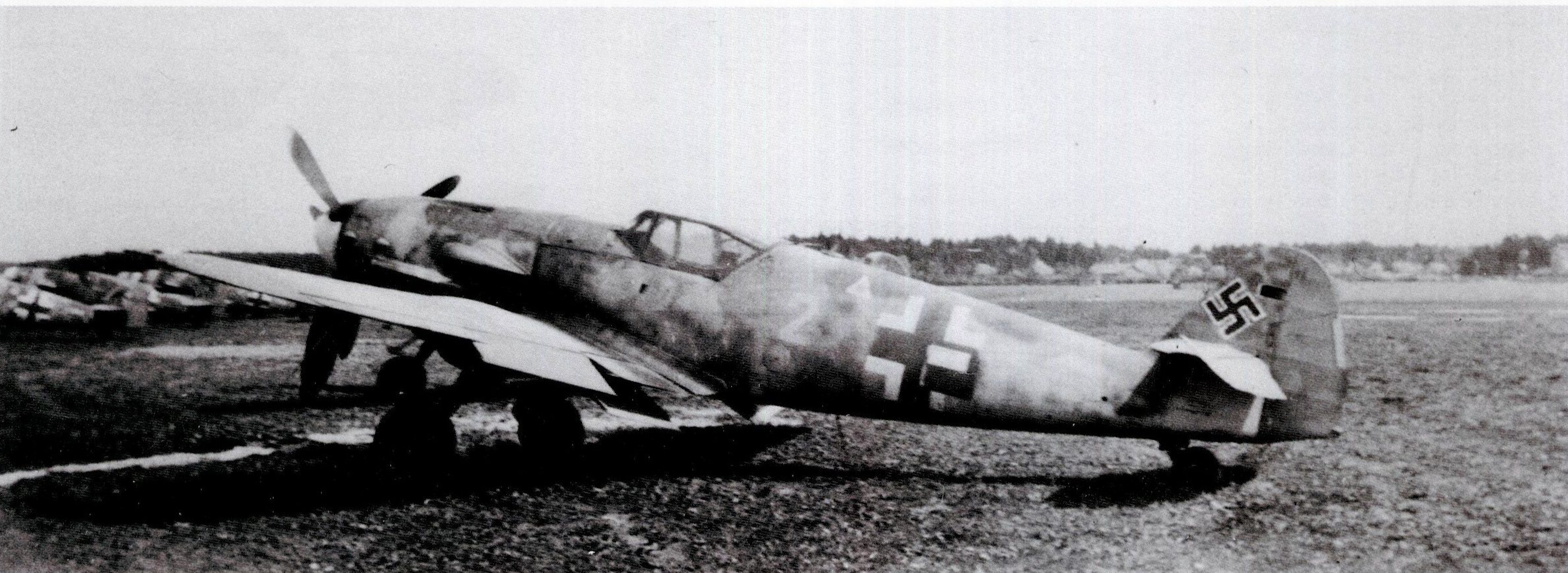


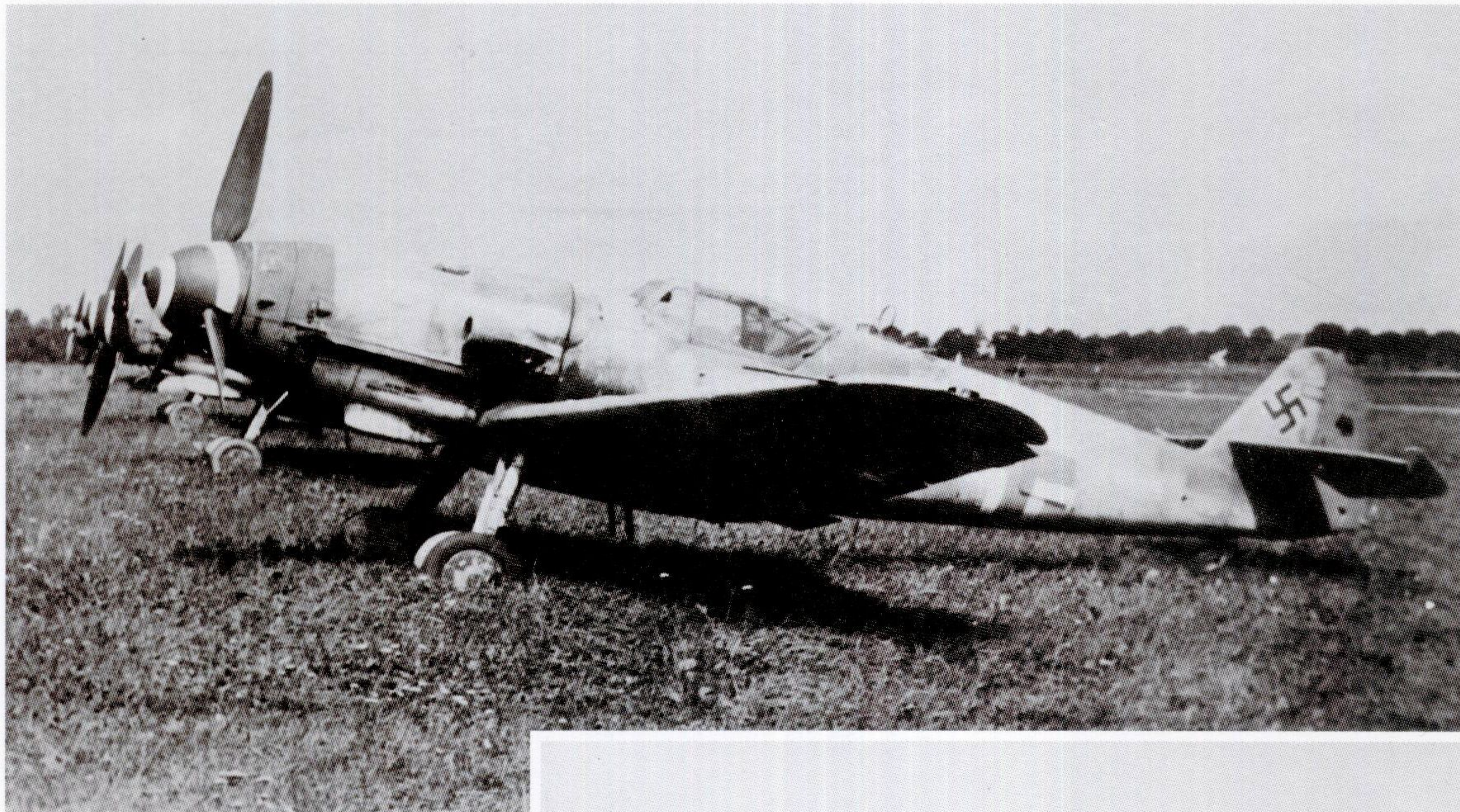
THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE TOP AND CENTRE: Another Hungarian Bf 109 G-10 flown into Neubiberg was 'Yellow 12', W.Nr. 612769 of 101/3, shown here landing (*TOP*) and its subsequent fate. From early April 1945, each of the 101 Fighter Wing's three fighter groups had an establishment of 16 aircraft. Tactical markings were similar to the German system, with coloured numbers indicating the group; white for the 1st Group, black for the 2nd and yellow for the 3rd. Note the white segment on the otherwise green RLM 70 spinner shown (*BELOW LEFT*). Some of the aircraft at Neubiberg remained there at least until the winter of 1945/46. Included in these views is an Me 262 A-1a, W.Nr. 500004, in a natural metal finish but with all panel lines filled with a yellow-green putty sanded flush with the metal skin to give a smooth aerodynamic surface. This machine had an interesting and varied history. Built at Obertraubling, it was first employed by 2./KG 51 as an A-2a, but after being damaged on 21 February 1945 when a tyre burst while landing, it was repaired and apparently saw further service with 2./NAG 6, and possibly also with 1./NAG 13, before being captured at Neubiberg.



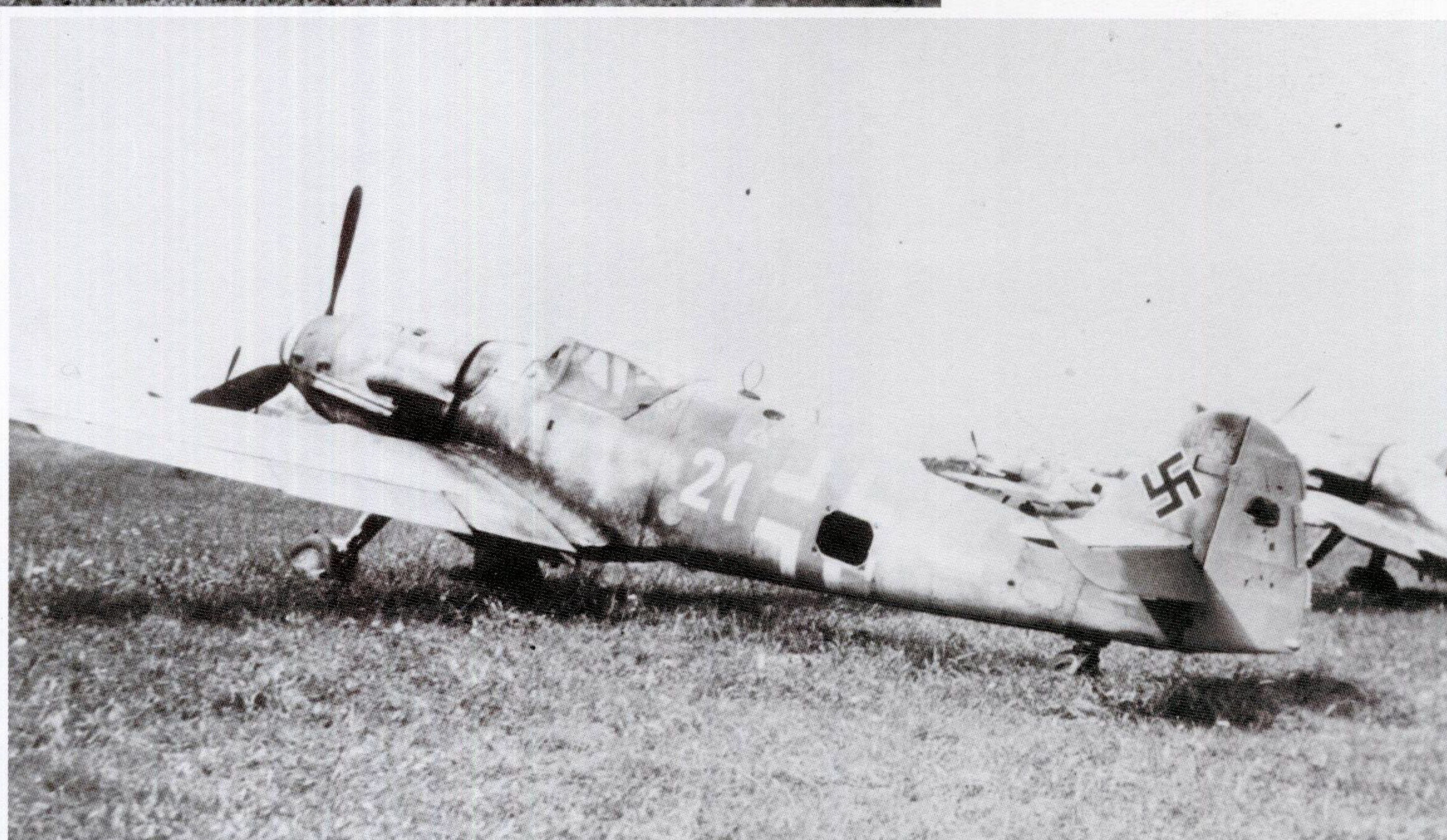


BELOW:
This Bf 109 G-10
'Yellow 2' of II./JG 52
also landed at
Neubiberg on 8 May.



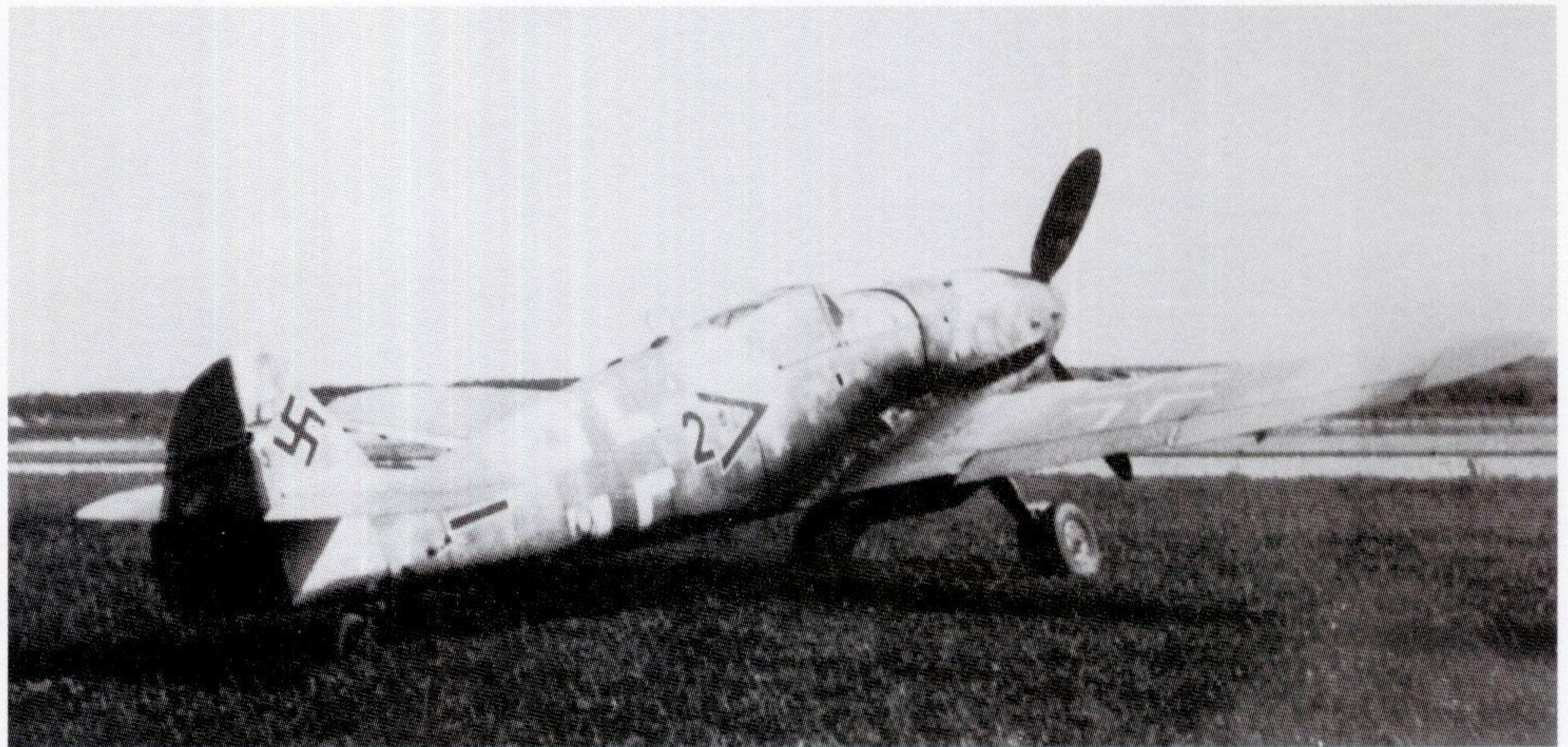
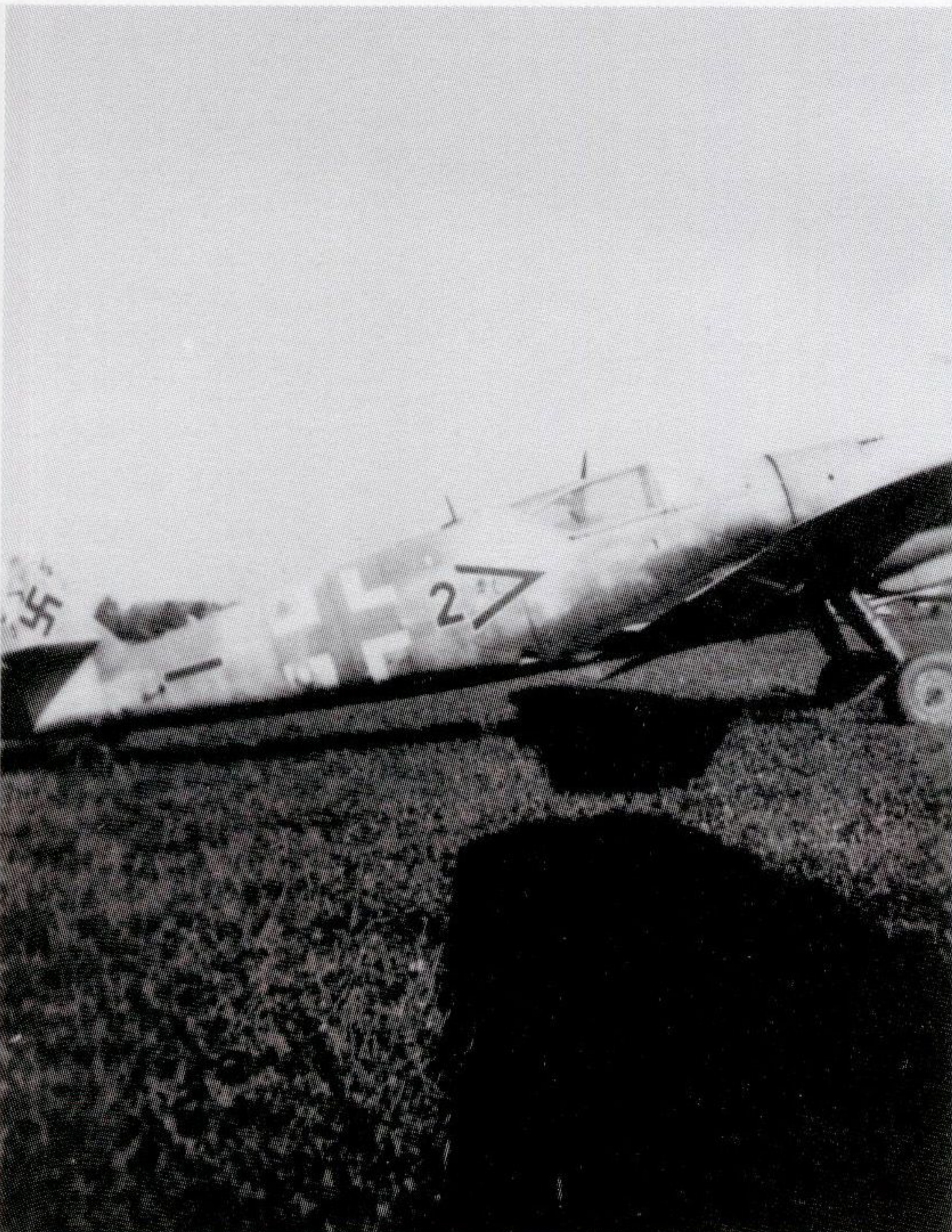


LEFT AND BELOW: This Bf 109 G-14, W.Nr 464549, of II./JG 52 also landed at Neubiberg on 8 May. Note the yellow rudder and the yellow band around the nose of 'White 21' and that the Werknummer is positioned above the Hakenkreuz. The uppersurface camouflage colours are thought to be 74/75 or possibly 83/75, and the undersides of the wingtips were yellow. Note that the white II. Gruppe bar behind the fuselage Balkenkreuz is barely visible in these photographs.

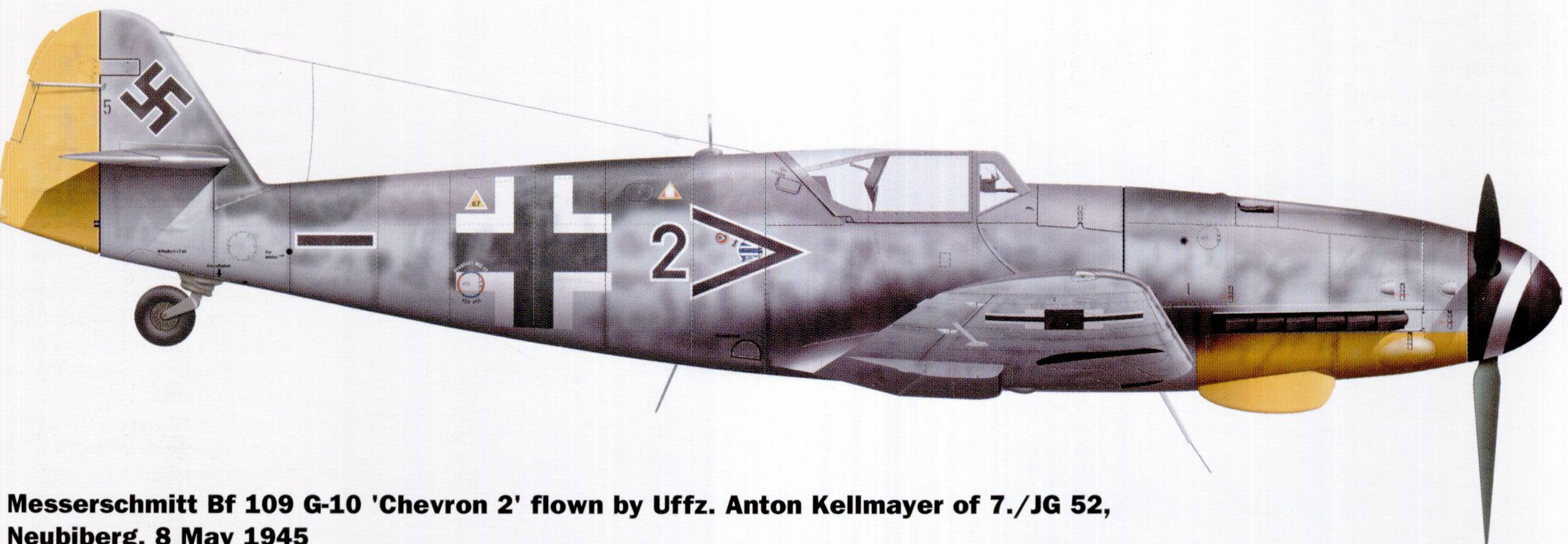


BELOW RIGHT: Although the port wing hides much of the fuselage detail, the presence of tailwheel doors confirm that this machine is a Bf 109 K-4 which is believed to have been marked with the double chevron of the Kommandeur of II./JG 52 and may therefore have been the machine flown by Ritterkreuzträger Hptm. Wilhelm Batz. The aircraft flew to Neubiberg to surrender on 8 May but was photographed some months later in the summer of 1945. Note that this is one of the later production aircraft and, unlike the earlier examples of the K-4, much of the undersurface of the wing appears unpainted although the directive to simplify the underwing Balkenkreuz by deleting the white segments has been disregarded. While the K-4 had additional undercarriage doors to cover the mainwheel when retracted, they have been removed from this machine but the clamshell type doors for the retractable tailwheel have been retained. On the rear fuselage, as well as the black II. Gruppe bar edged in white, is the roughly sprayed number 215 which represented the last three digits of the Werknummer. This was used to identify the machine while it was in transit from the factory to its operational unit, the earlier four-letter Stammkennzeichen having been deleted to save on unnecessary labour. As all Bf 109 K-4 Werknummern were in the 330000 series, the number of this machine may be narrowed down to 33215. Camouflage colours are believed to have been 75/83 on the uppersurface with minimal 76 below the wings and the machine had a yellow nose band and rudder.





THIS PAGE: Originally flown to Neubiberg by Uffz. Anton Kellmayer of 7./JG 52 on 8 May 1945, this Bf 109 G-10 was still on the airfield in August/September. The markings are those of an aircraft belonging to Stab/JG 52 and although the Werknummer, thought to have been 611155, was originally applied to the rudder, this has been painted yellow and obscures all but the final number 5 to the right of the rudder hinge line. Behind 'Chevron 2' is a Siebel 204 D coded SK+LF which, as it has been painted in US markings, was probably flown in the months following the end of the war. Beyond the Siebel is another Bf 109 G-10 and an Fw 190.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-10 'Chevron 2' flown by Uffz. Anton Kellmayer of 7./JG 52, Neubiberg, 8 May 1945

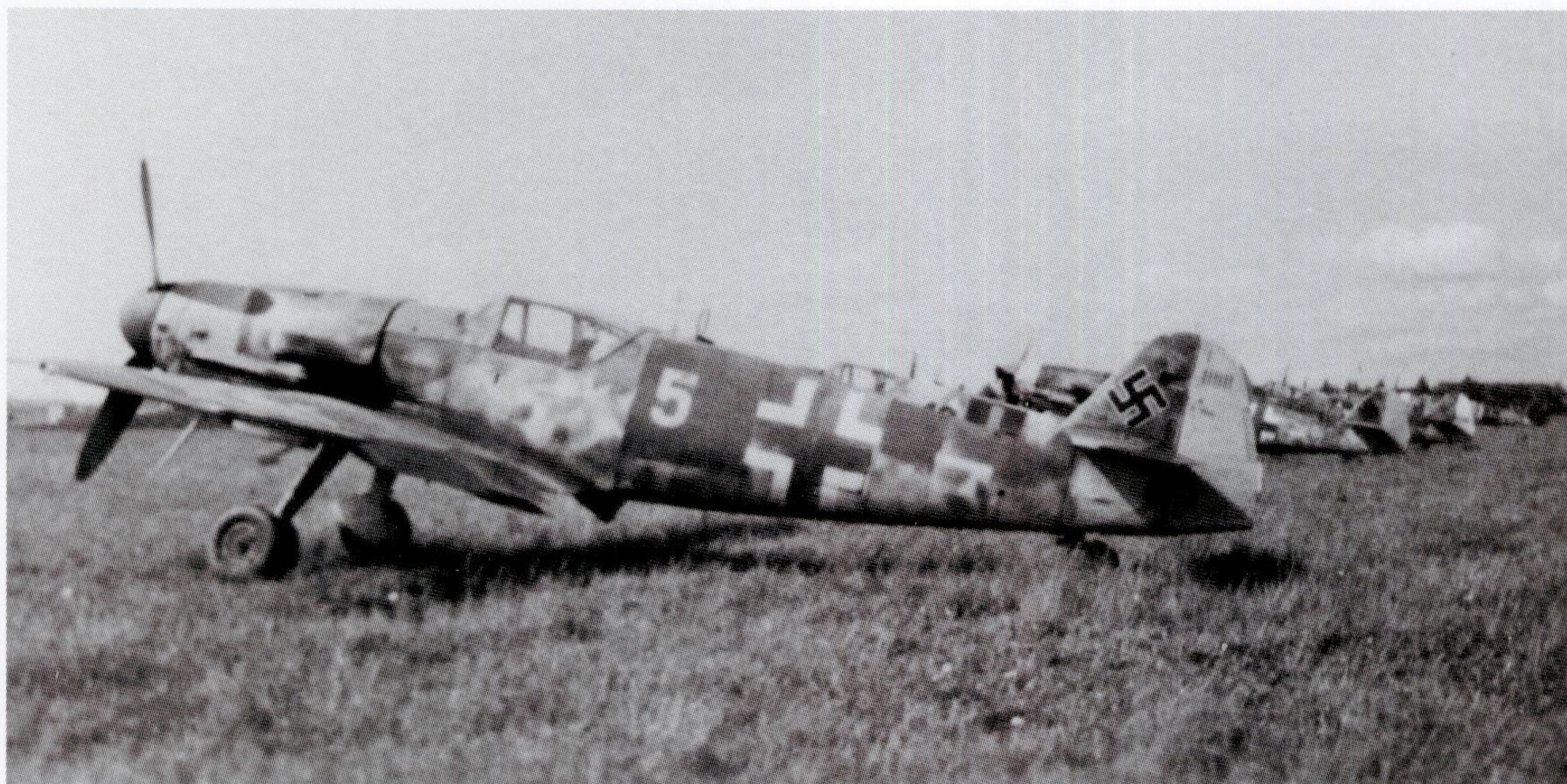
The contrast between the camouflage colours on this machine strongly suggest that it was finished in the standard day fighter scheme of 74/75/76. Note the last digit of the Werknummer on the vertical tail surface and that although this machine had a yellow rudder, it had no yellow nose band as the aircraft was subordinate to Luftflotte 6 and the band was only applied to aircraft of Luftflotte 4.



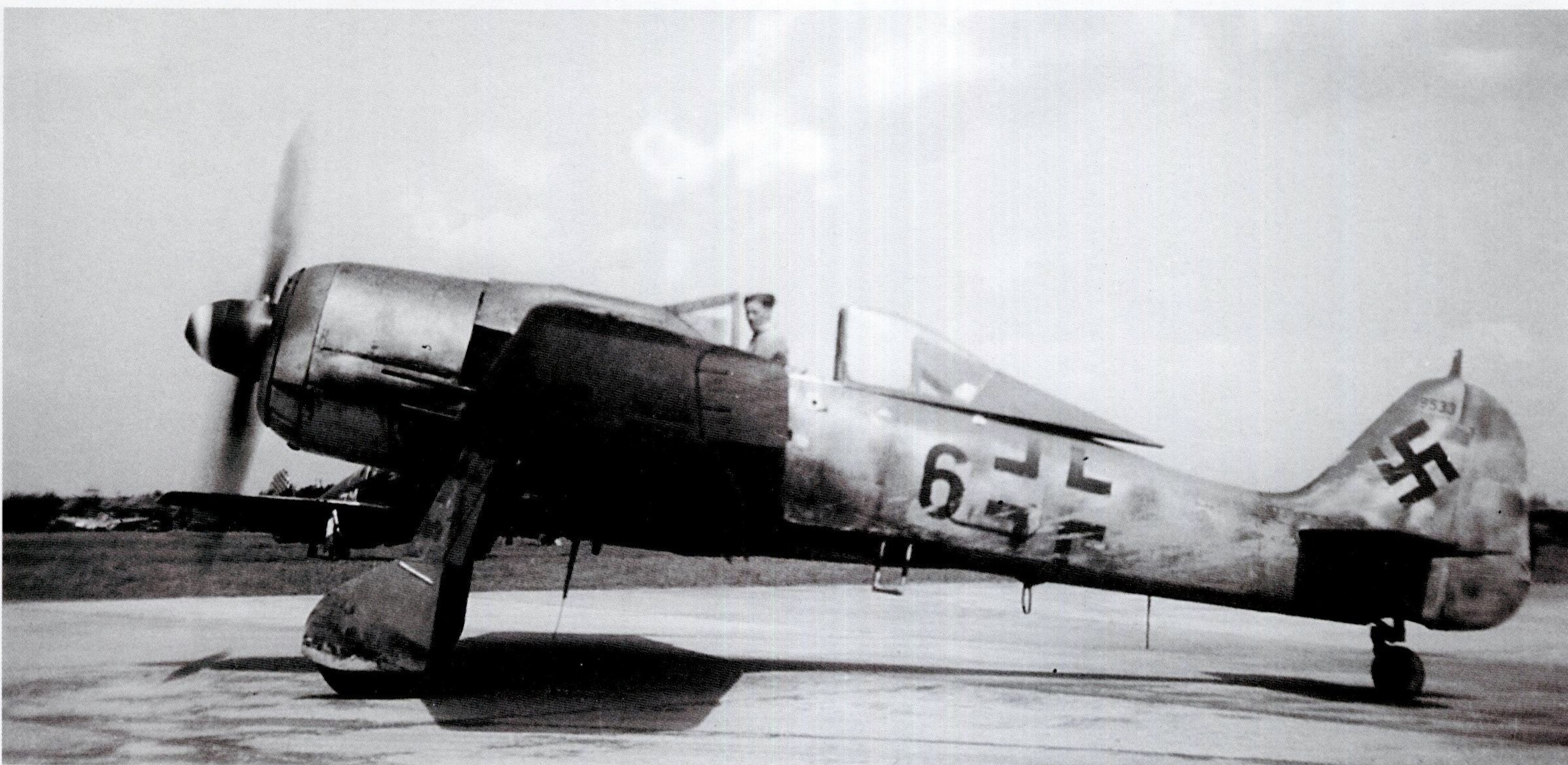
ABOVE: This late model Bf 109 G-10 'White 2' of 7./JG 52 at Neubiberg clearly shows signs of having had its tactical code changed and the painted out marking to either side of the fuselage Balkenkreuz may previously have been the long pointed bar of the Geschwader Adjutant (— + —). The fact that the II. Gruppe bar has been painted over a similar marking would tend to confirm that the original marking behind the cross was the 'tail' of Stab marking, which would have been in black, outlined white.



LEFT: Although displaying deceptively similar markings to the machine shown above, this is thought to be an entirely different aircraft as the areas around the Gruppe bar and tactical number on the starboard side show no signs of having been repainted. Note also that the blister for the MG 131 machine gun is not the streamlined type shown previously and that the width of the white spiral on the spinner seems to be slightly wider. At this stage of the war, however, when aircraft manufacturers were utilising whatever components were available, it would not have been unusual for an aircraft to have both types of blister. In this case, the machine is thought to be a G-14, a sub-type which used many parts from various earlier versions, most noticeable here being the type of engine cowlings first seen on the G-5.



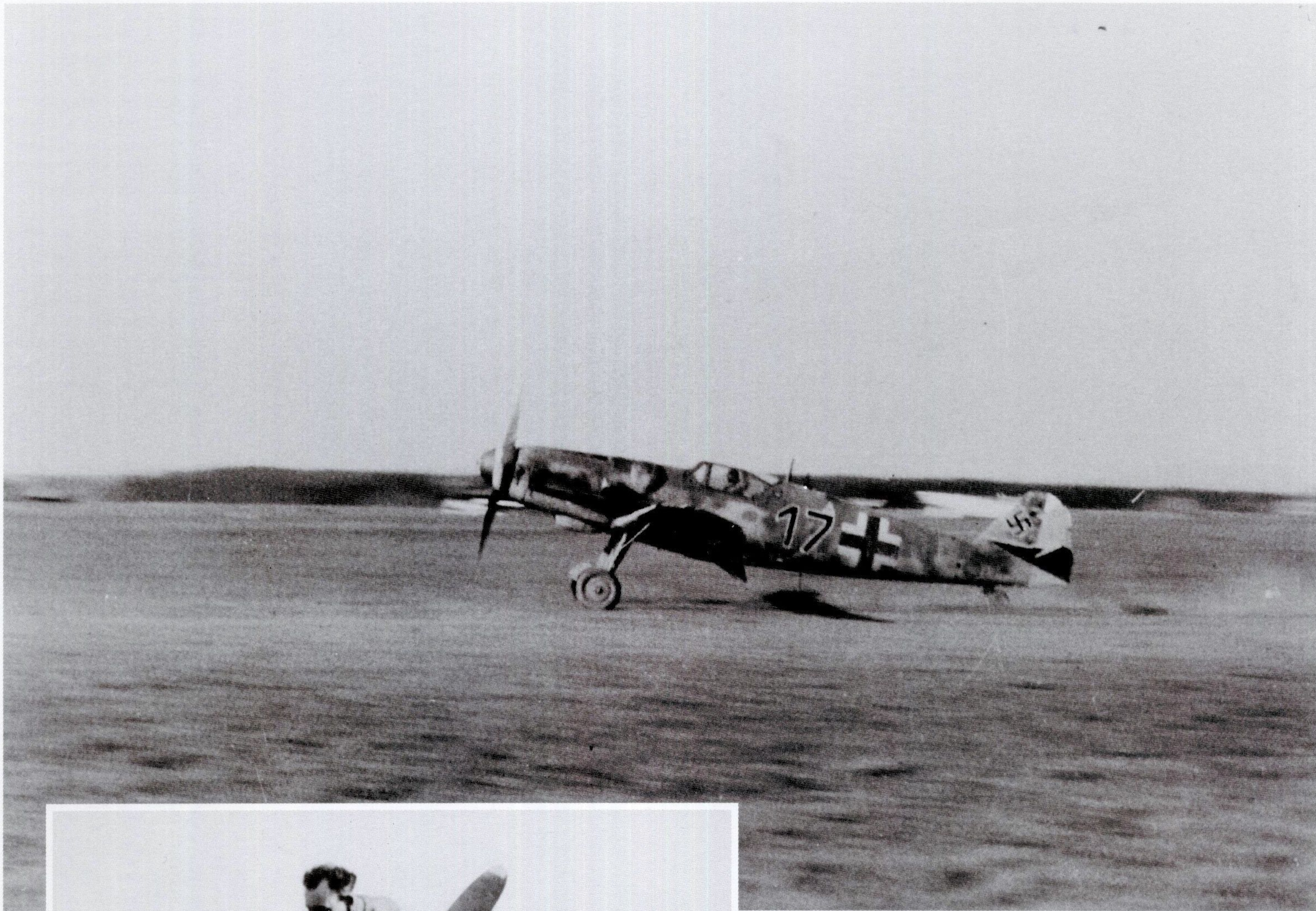
LEFT: A Bf 109 G-10, 'White 5', W.Nr. 611048 of 7./JG 52 at Neubiberg. The tactical number of this machine has obviously been changed as a large area forward the fuselage cross shows where earlier markings have been overpainted. The camouflage appears to be 75/83/76 with fairly heavy mottling on the fuselage sides, while the rudder was yellow and was marked with seven victory bars. The aircraft also has a yellow band around the nose.



ABOVE: On 8 May, two Fw 190s of 2./JG 6 flew into the American occupied airfield at Fürth to surrender. This A-8, W.Nr. 739533 with the tactical number 'Red 6', was manufactured at the Ago works at Ochtersleben at the end of 1944 and the fuselage at least was almost certainly finished in a two-tone uppersurface scheme in which the lighter of the two colours was grey 75 and the darker green either 81 or 83. The uppersurface of the wings and tailplane may also have been in 75 and 83. The fuselage sides are 76, mottled with the same green and grey as on the upper fuselage, and although the undersurfaces of the wings were probably also 76, the undercarriage fairings appear to have been oversprayed, perhaps with 83, to darken them. This photograph was taken a few days after the pilot of the aircraft surrendered and shows an American in the cockpit.



RIGHT: Another aircraft of 2./JG 6 which landed at Fürth on 8 May was this Fw 190 A-8 W.Nr. 961118 with the tactical number 'Red 5'. Built by Norddeutsche Dornier in December 1944 or January 1945, the aircraft was probably finished in a similar scheme to 'Red 6' described above.



LEFT AND ABOVE: Among other units to surrender at Fürth when Germany capitulated was the close-range reconnaissance unit 2./NAG 14. Here, (*ABOVE*) one of the Staffel's Bf 109 G-14s, W.Nr. 463141, 'Black 17' is shown landing on 8 May 1945, with the pilot (*LEFT*) giving himself up to US personnel.

BELOW LEFT AND BELOW: Two further views of 'Black 17' at Fürth. Note the Fw 190 D-9, W.Nr. 211934 of Stab II./JG 6 in the background.





ABOVE AND RIGHT: The pilot of this Bf 109 G-10, W.Nr. 770269, 'Black 12' of 2./NAG 14 also surrendered at Fürth on 8 May 1945. The lower parts of the undercarriage fairings have been removed.

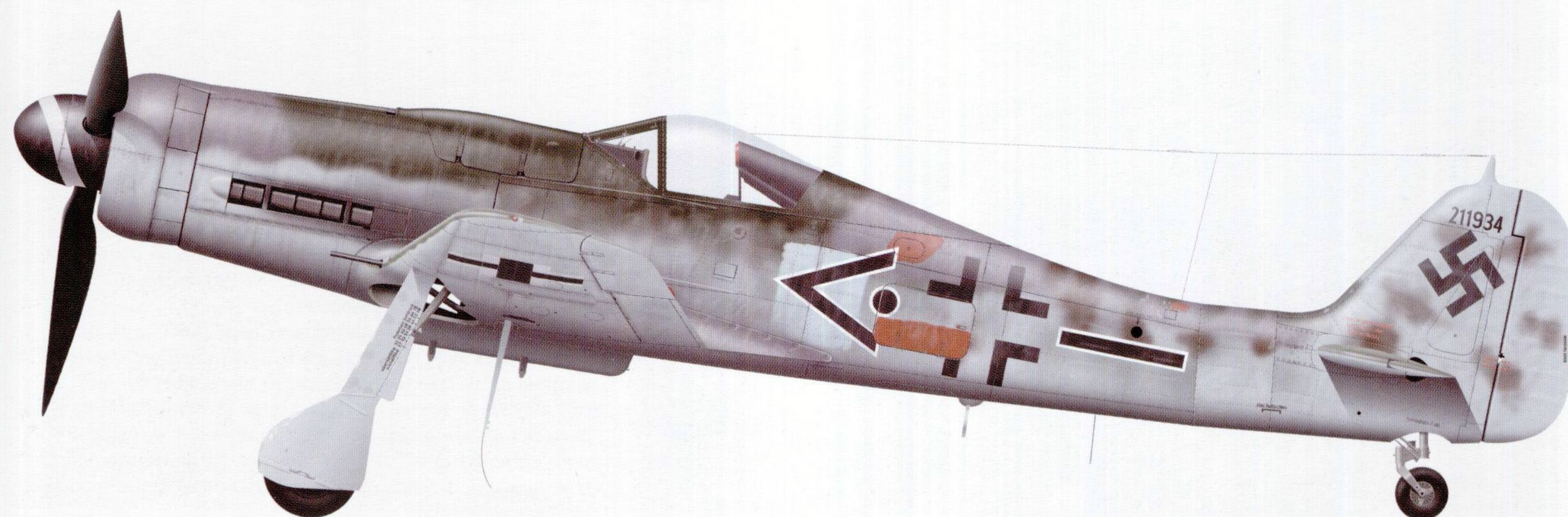


RIGHT: The centre aircraft in this line-up at Fürth is an Fw 190 D-9 of Stab II./JG 6, the subject of the profile below. On the left is the nose of 'Black 17' of 2./NAG 14 and on the right a Ju 87 D of a night ground-attack unit.



Focke-Wulf Fw 190 D-9, W.Nr. 211934, of Stab II./JG 6, Fürth, 8 May 1945

The markings on the side of the fuselage suggest this aircraft was assigned to the Gruppe's Technical Officer, although whether he was flying it when the aircraft landed at Fürth on 8 May 1945 is not known. The machine was finished in 75 and 83 on the uppersurfaces with the fuselage sides mottled in these colours over the undersurface colour 76. The spinner was black with a white spiral and all markings were in the simplified style, the swastika being solid black and all crosses the outline type.

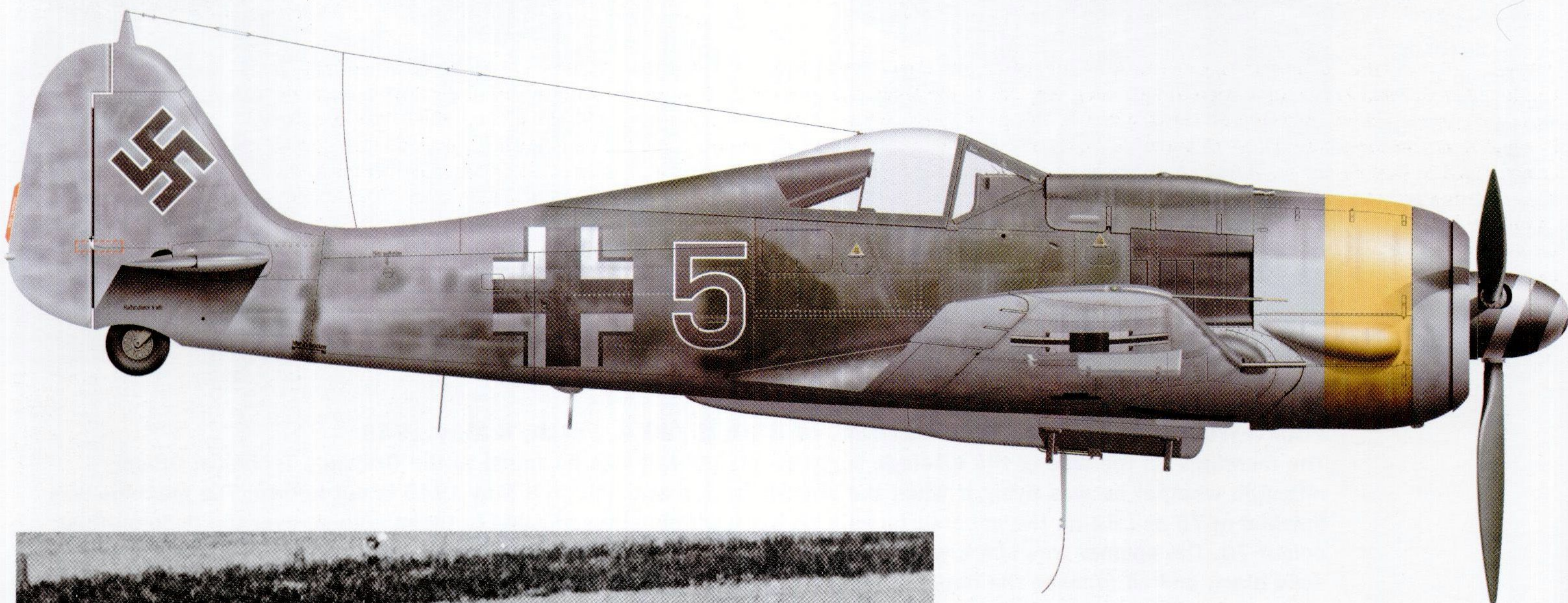


RIGHT: An Fw 190 F-8 'Black 5', on Ceské Budejovice airfield, Czechoslovakia, in May 1945. This aircraft, which is thought to have flown with Schlachtgeschwader 10, had a yellow band around the nose. This machine was camouflaged in the earlier 74/75/76 scheme but, due to the light conditions and the use of 83 on various areas of the fuselage, the finish appears quite dark. Just visible to the right of the tactical number is a darker area where an earlier identity had been overpainted in 83.

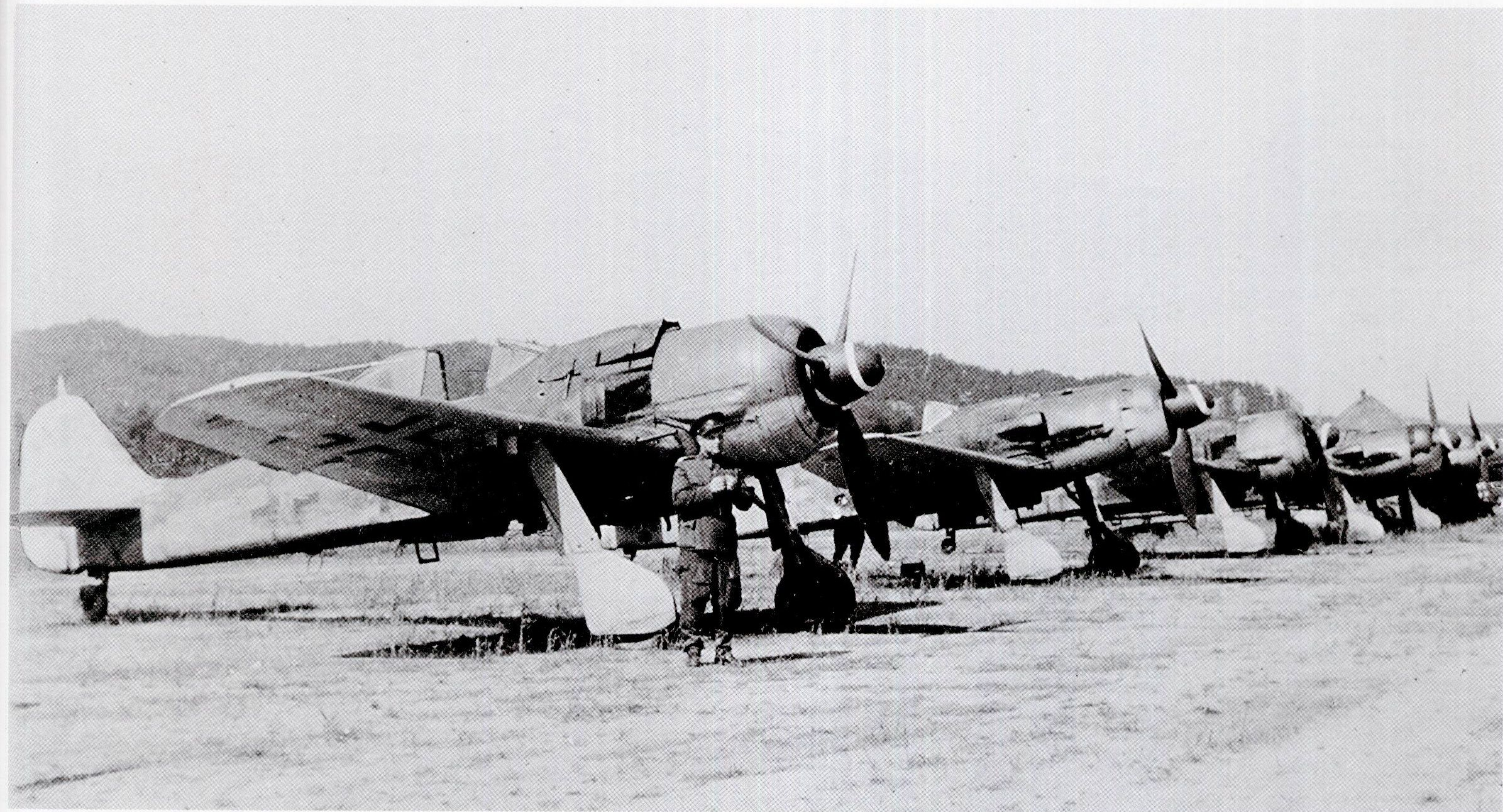


Focke-Wulf Fw 190 F-8 'Black 5', probably of SG 10, Ceské Budejovice, Czechoslovakia, May 1945

Although still in service at the end of the war, this is believed to have been a relatively old machine and was therefore largely finished in the 74/75/76 scheme but with some areas touched up in 83, presumably as a result of modifications or repairs. At some time, 83 was also used to paint out an earlier tactical marking on the fuselage which, from its triangular shape, appears to have been a Stab marking, possibly a Gruppenkommandeur's double chevron.



LEFT: The machine seen top centre in this collection of aircraft is thought to be the same 'Black 5' as shown above but which, due to the brighter light conditions, shows more clearly the 74/75/76 scheme and the extent to which the finish on the upper surface of the wings and tailplane had faded. Also more evident is the painted-out Stab marking ahead of the tactical number. The Fw 190 coded 'Black 4' is also thought to have belonged to SG 10 and, because of the pointed bar aft of the number, may have flown with the Geschwader Stab. Below 'Black 4' is 'White 2' of 7./SG 10 with simplified fuselage Balkenkreuze in black, and 'White 3', also of 7./SG 10. Note that on the fuselage of 'White 2' there is no clear demarcation between the colours used, probably 83 with either 81 or 82, and that this may be an example of the so-called 'cloud' finish mentioned elsewhere in the section on late war camouflage.



ABOVE: Although the unconditional German surrender came into effect at 00.01 hrs on 8 May 1945, fighting in Czechoslovakia sometimes continued as German forces there tried to fight their way out to the American lines rather than give themselves up to the Soviets. In some areas the fighting did not end until 10 May, the date of this photograph, taken on Mimon-Hradcany airfield. The line up of Fw 190s consists of F-8s and D-9s positioned alternately. All aircraft have the late war style of outline type markings and the dark finish suggests that they were camouflaged in RLM 81 and 82 with 76 undersurfaces. Note however that the Fw 190 F-8 nearest the camera has a much lighter tail unit. After the dispersal of the aircraft factories, sub-assemblies were produced by a range of sub-contractors and finished in camouflage colours and patterns which were sometimes incompatible. Sometimes, however, airframes were oversprayed after final assembly to blend the various finishes, particularly on tail units and engine cowlings, with the main fuselage scheme. In this case, the engine and fuselage colour are already a good match. The Fw 190 F-8 in the foreground has a faint II. Gruppe bar suggesting that it belonged to II./SG 2 while the Fw 190 D-9s almost certainly belonged to II./JG 6, although II./JG 301 also operated this variant from bases in Czechoslovakia.

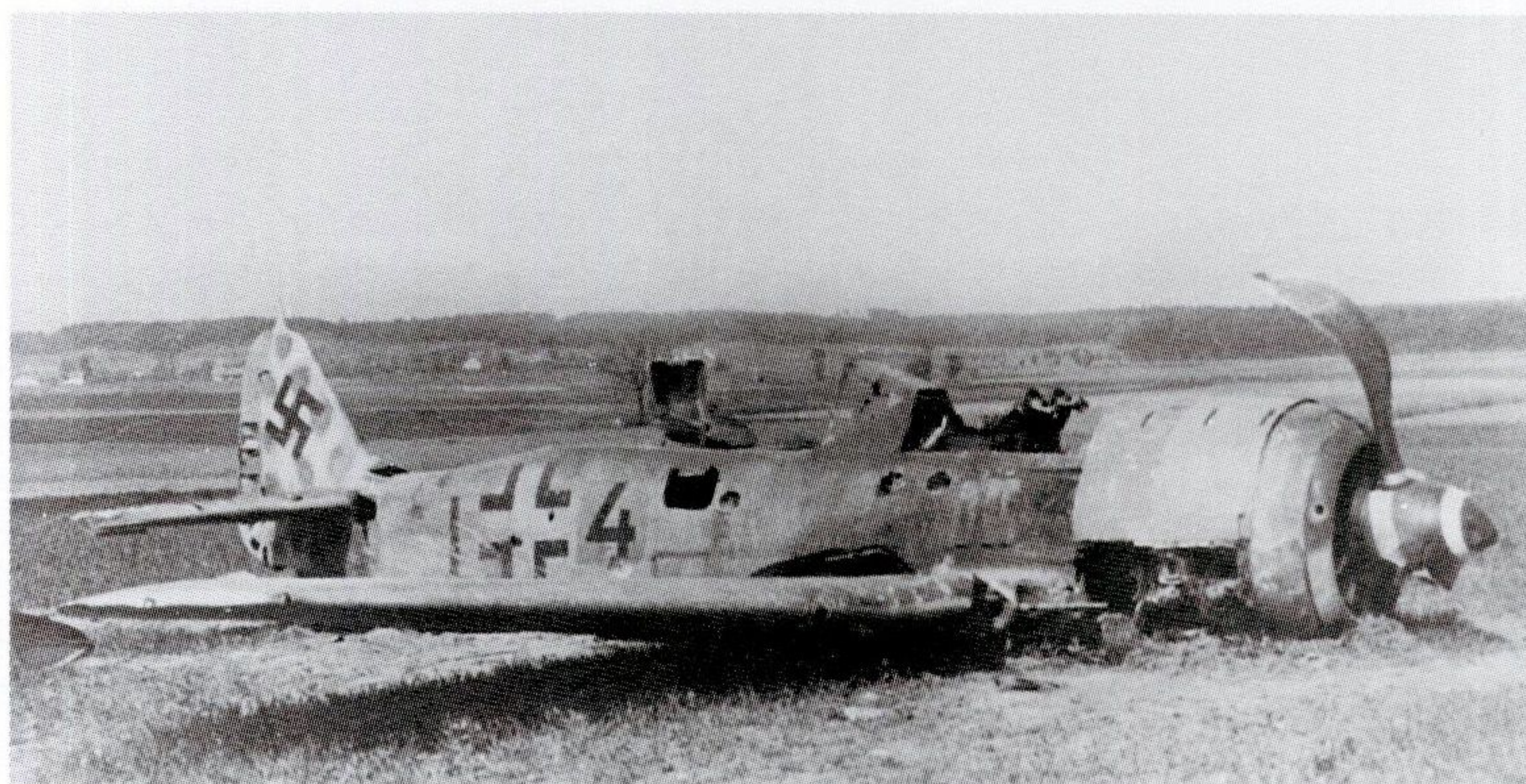
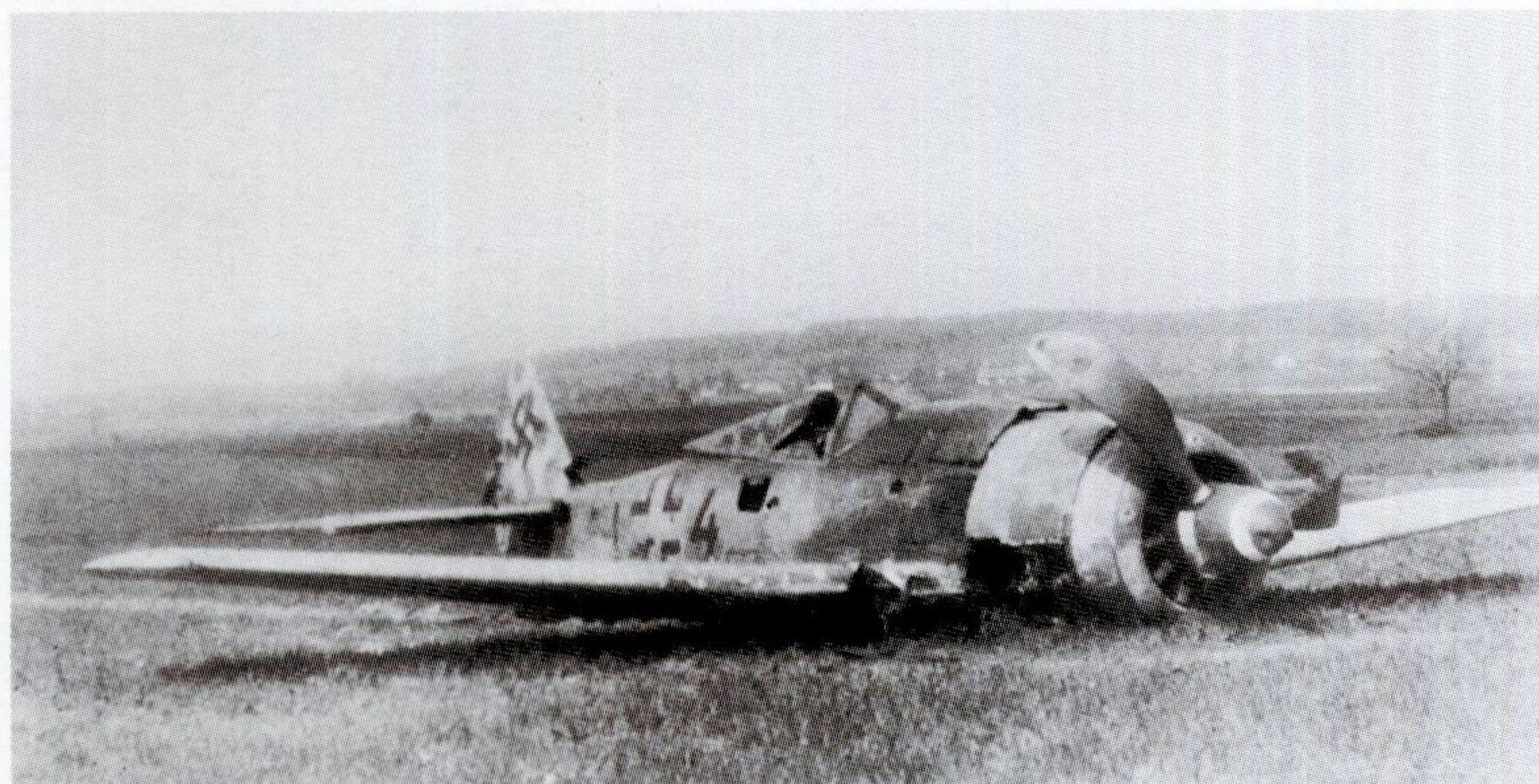
RIGHT: A burned-out Ju 88 and three of the Fw 190s abandoned by SG 4 at Hradec Králové. In the foreground is 'Yellow 11', an F-8, W.Nr. 586614 of 6./SG 4 which has a simplified Hakenkreuz on the tail and should have had outline style crosses on the fuselage. The marking of the tactical numbers on the lower part of the undercarriage fairings, as seen on the aircraft to the right, 'Black 6', was a feature of aircraft operated by SG 4.



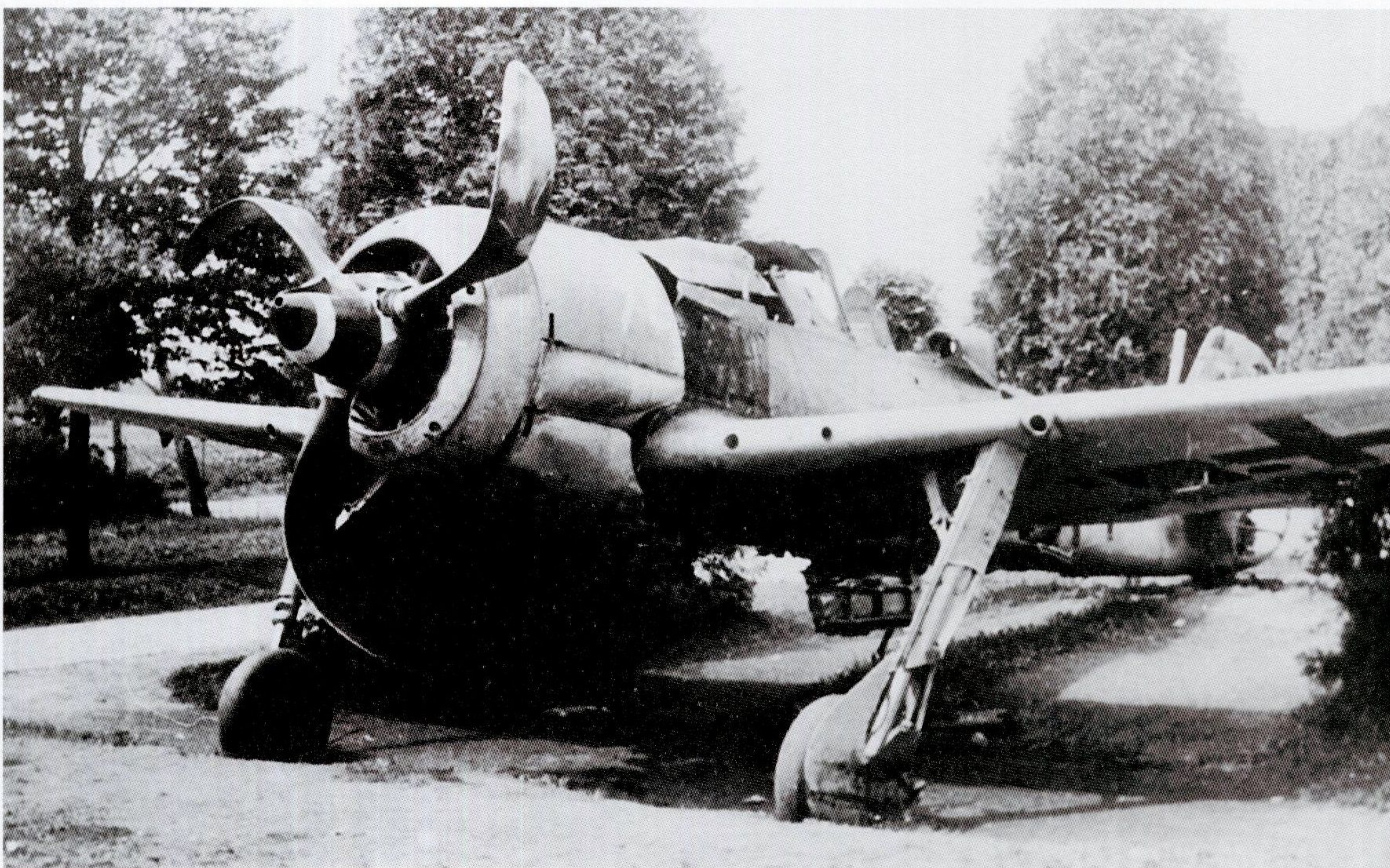


Focke-Wulf Fw 190 F-8 'Black 4' of III./SG 10, Czechoslovakia, May 1945

This machine was probably only partly converted to an F-8 as no bomb racks were fitted under the wing, which retained the outer cannon ports usually deleted from ground-attack variants, and the only weapons attachment point was under the fuselage. The aircraft was finished in the standard day fighter scheme of 74, 75 and 76 but with late-war national insignia in the simplified style. The yellow band around the nose was painted over a white ferry marking on the cowling, more of this number, a '7', being visible on the port side than on the starboard side. The area under the fuselage numeral where a previous tactical identification had been painted out was in 02.



ABOVE LEFT, ABOVE RIGHT AND RIGHT: Emboldened by the proximity of advancing Soviet units towards the end of the war, partisan units in Czechoslovakia increased their activities and, beginning on 1 May, began a series of armed uprisings which resulted in a deterioration of German control in occupied areas within Czechoslovakia. One such partisan supported uprising occurred in the town of Holice on 6 May 1945 where the rebels were attacked by three Fw 190s from Major Arnold Blasig's III./SG 10. German troops followed up the attack and dispersed the rebels, but one of the Fw 190s, 'Black 4', was damaged in the attack and made a forced landing in a field at Ostretin (*ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT*). The machine was later taken to Holice where it was placed on display (*RIGHT*). Note the yellow band around the upper nose and the overpainted white '7' on the engine cowling, a remnant of an identification number used during ferry flights.

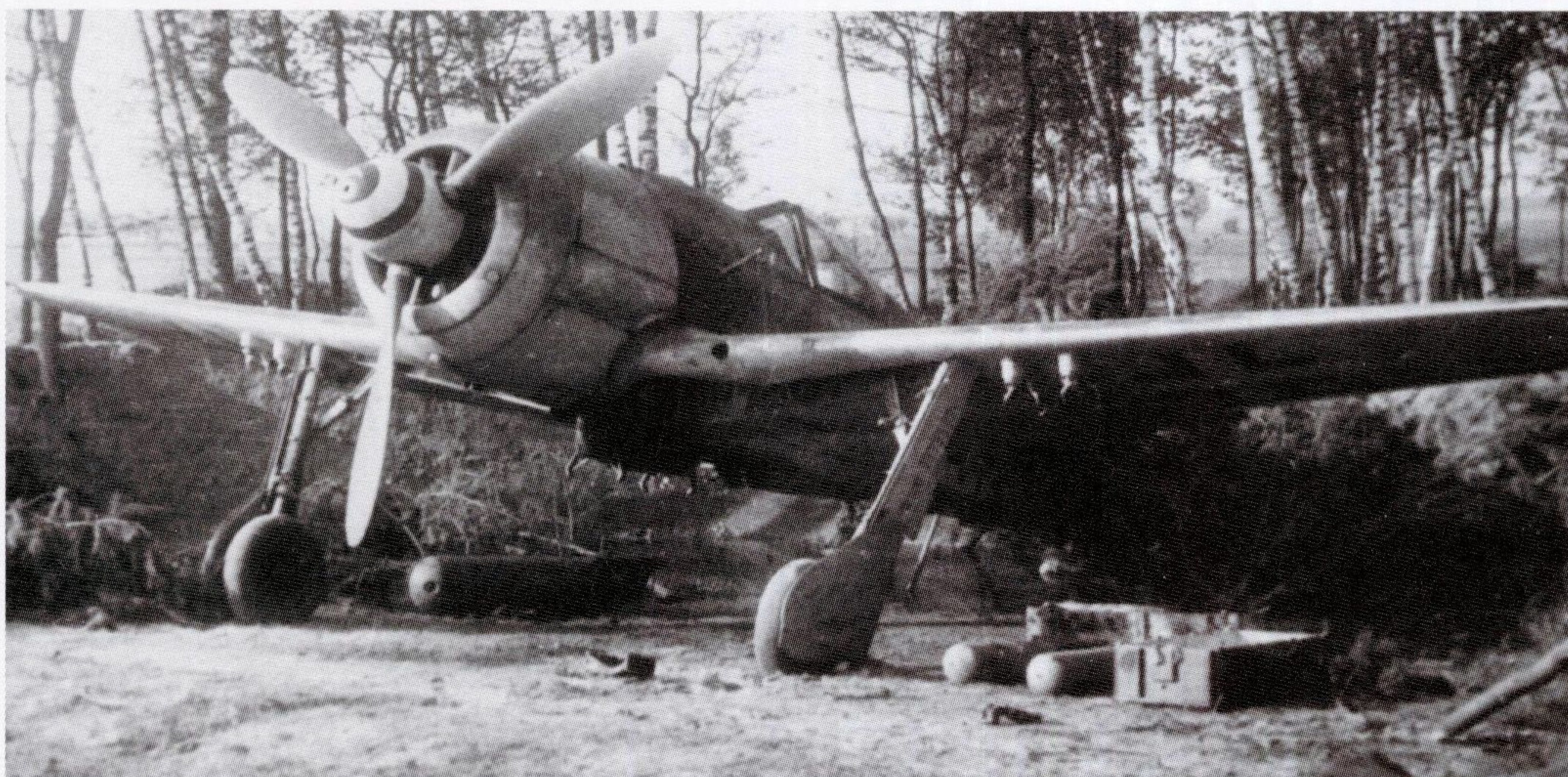




LEFT: The fuselages of various Bf 109 Gs found at Havlíčkov Brod, in Czechoslovakia in May 1945. The aircraft nearest the camera is a Bf 109 G-14 'White 11' with, behind it to the left, a G-14/AS 'Black 7', W.Nr. 786476, formerly of 2./JG 52. Behind that is a most interesting Bf 109 G-10/U4, W.Nr. 612762 with the tactical number 'White 24', which was assigned to Jagdstaffel 5 of the ROA; the Russkaya Osvoboditelnaya Armiya, or Russian Liberation Army, also known as the National Army of Liberation. The ROA was led by the captured Russian General Andrei Andreyevich Vlasov and consisted of disaffected Soviet PoWs and other volunteers prepared to fight with the Germans against Stalin. According to various sources, some 50,000 men were serving in the ROA in January 1945 and the air component, an Air Corps under General Vladimir Maltsev, may have consisted of as many as 8,000 men. In May 1945, the Air Corps surrendered to the US Third Army on condition that they were not handed back to the Soviets, an agreement which the Americans honoured with the exception of Maltsev whom the Americans handed over after lengthy interrogation. Vlasov also surrendered to the Americans but was later abducted by the Soviets. Both men were later executed for treason, espionage and terrorist activities against the USSR.



RIGHT: An Fw 190 of an unidentified Schlachtgruppe photographed at České Budějovice in Czechoslovakia after the war. Originally, the uppersurface camouflage was almost certainly 74 and 75, but the darker areas of 81 and 83 which extend well down the fuselage sides, suggest that this machine has been refurbished at a repair centre.



LEFT: Clearly, not all retreating German units destroyed their aircraft before departing and this Fw 190 F-8 of II./SG 77 photographed at Pardubice not only appears undamaged but, to judge from the various bombs also left behind, was evidently in the process of being prepared for another sortie shortly before it was abandoned. Note however, that although the wing armament has been removed, this could have occurred after the machine was captured. The spinner was probably yellow with the elaborate spiral in black and white.

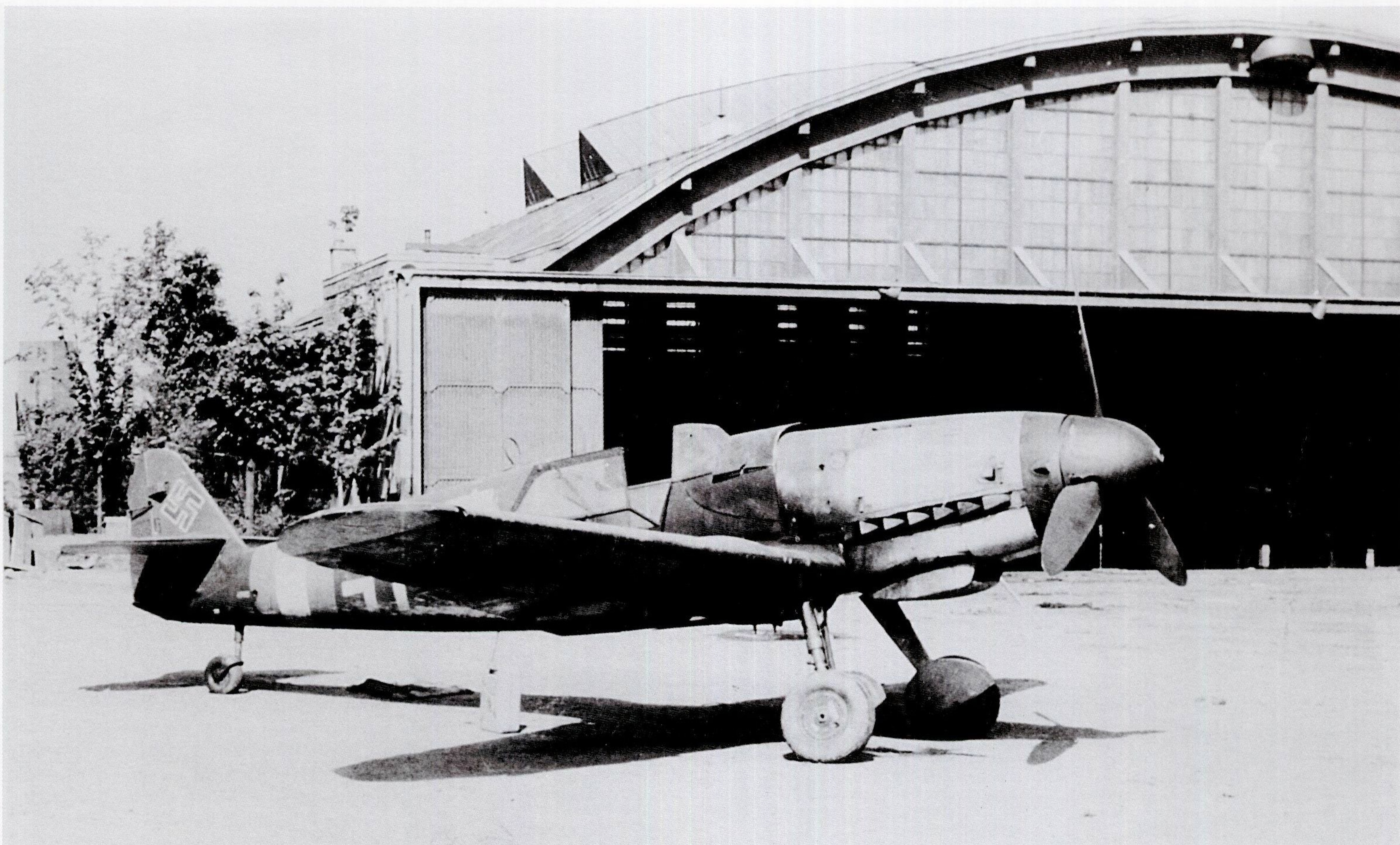


ABOVE: This Fw 190 F-8 'Black 2' W.Nr. 9324351 was photographed at Chrudim in Czechoslovakia and probably belonged to SG 77. The unusual camouflage pattern is similar to another Fw 190 F-8 coded 'Black M' of III./SG 3 which landed in Sweden in 1945 (see page 164) and is thought to have originally comprised a very faded 74/75/76 scheme on the fuselage with a conventional pattern of 74 and 75 on the upper surface of the wings and tailplane. Later, however, the machine was partially repainted using an unusual straw-coloured shade of 76 and additional patches of 83. The repainting was done in such a way that the original national markings were retained.



Focke-Wulf Fw 190 F-8 'Black 2' W.Nr. 932451 of SG 77, Chrudim, May 1945

While the upper surfaces of the wings and tailplane on this aircraft were finished in a very faded combination of 74 and 75, the unusual camouflage pattern on the fuselage suggests that the airframe had been recycled. During this process, it was standard practice to avoid a complete respray and to apply new paintwork only where necessary, sometimes by brushing, and usually avoiding the national insignia. As a result, a rather unusual shade of 76 has been applied to much of the fuselage, supplemented with random patches of RLM 83. Traces of the original 74/75/76 scheme are still visible around the national insignia on the tail and fuselage.

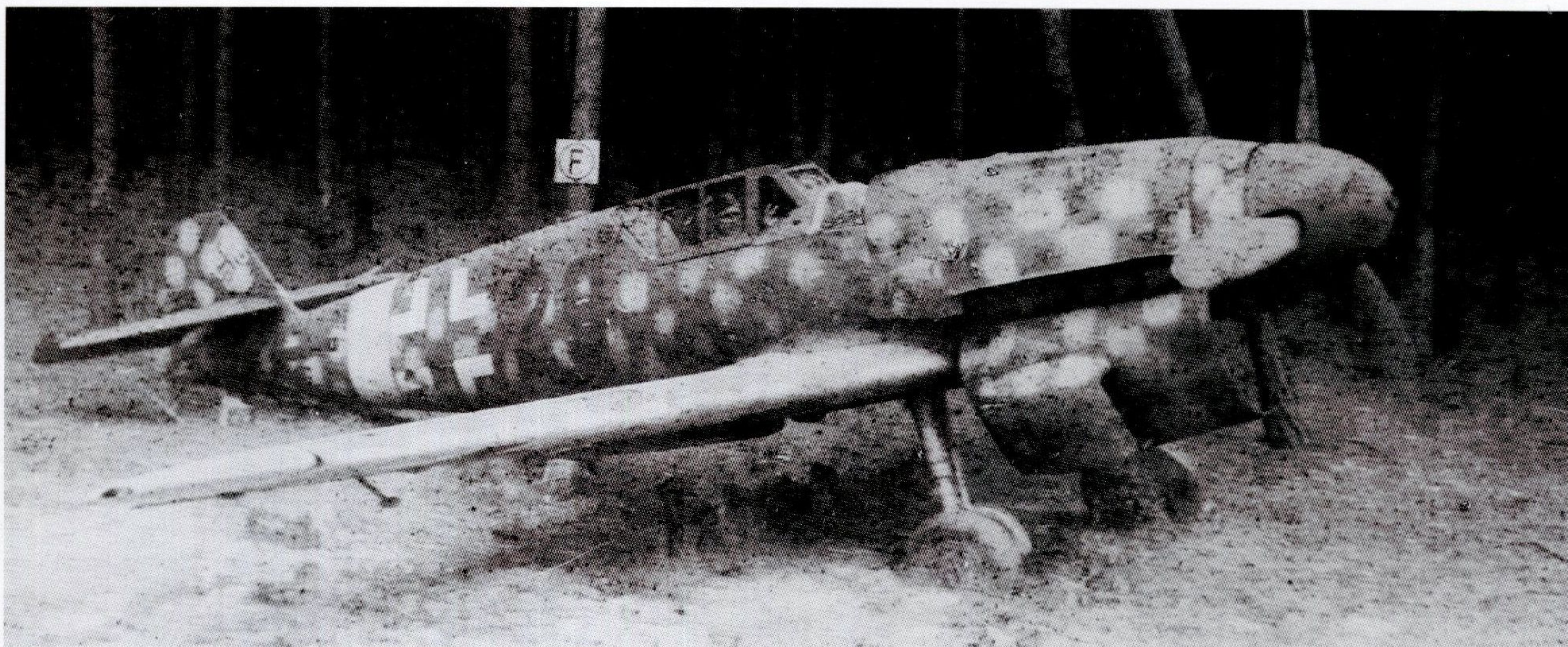


ABOVE: Found abandoned outside a hangar on the aerodrome at Prague-Kbely was this Bf 109 G-10, 'Yellow 7', which was photographed on 10 May 1945. Unfortunately, only the last digit of the Werknummer, a '6', is visible on the tail, but latest research suggests that this was an Erlo-built machine from batch 150000 or 151000 and that it served with 3./JG 300. Although most of JG 300 was in northern Germany and Poland at the end of the war, some aircraft were at Ainring when Germany surrendered and the aircraft may have come from there. Certainly, the fact that the machine had not been damaged by strafing US aircraft suggests that it must have been flown to Prague-Kbely only a few days before the end of the war and the Defence of the Reich bands around the rear fuselage are thought to be blue/white/blue, as used by JG 300. Note the mismatched cowling in a standard pattern of 74 and 75 over 76 and that, in accordance with late war instructions, the undersurfaces were largely unpainted with simplified outline style crosses in black.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-10 'Yellow 7' of 3./JG 300 at Prague-Kbely, 10 May 1945

The finish on this aircraft was in line with attempts to provide an improved defensive camouflage and consisted, apart from the engine cowling, of an overall dark green, possibly RLM 83 as shown here, or RLM 81. However the possibility also exists that both 81 and 83 may have been applied as, although no boundaries can be seen between the two colours, the contrast between them was low and therefore not easily distinguishable in monochrome photographs. Some stencilling appears on a lighter background of 76 where they had been masked off, and the engine cowling is finished in 74, 75 and 76, while the undersurfaces of the wings were largely natural metal with minimal painting. It should be noted that the W.Nr. 150006 shown in the profile is fictitious as, unfortunately, the complete number is not known.



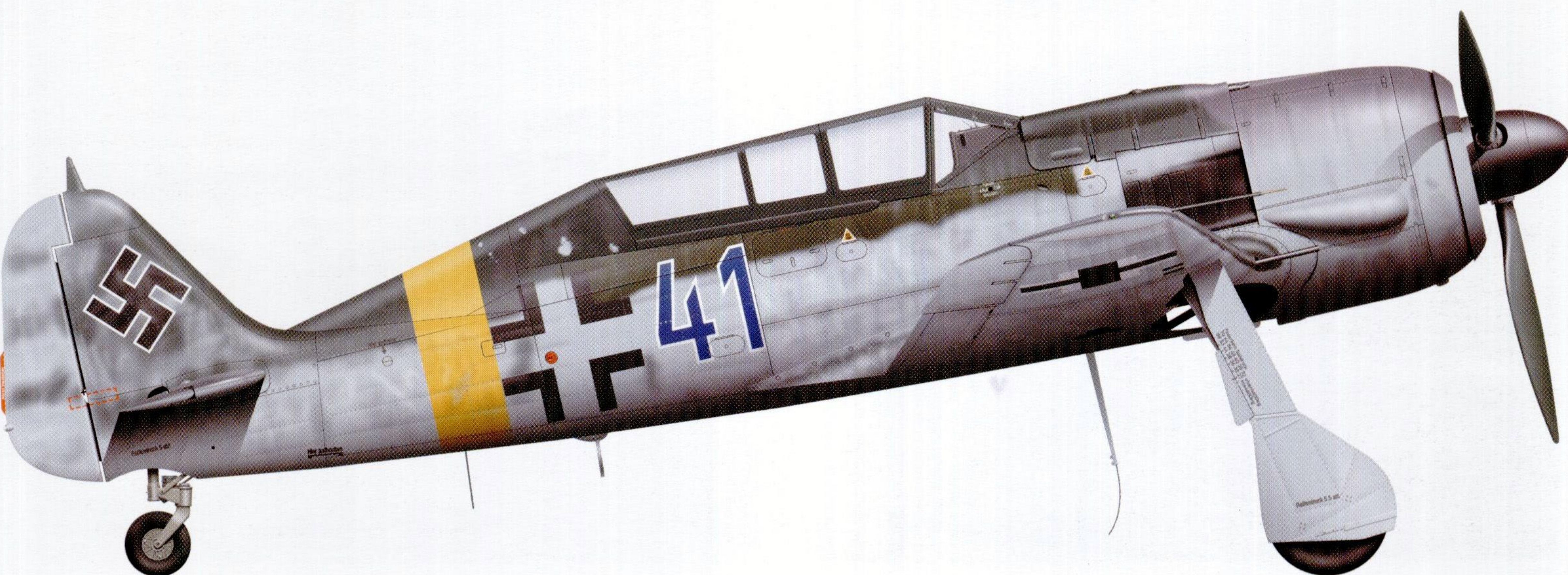
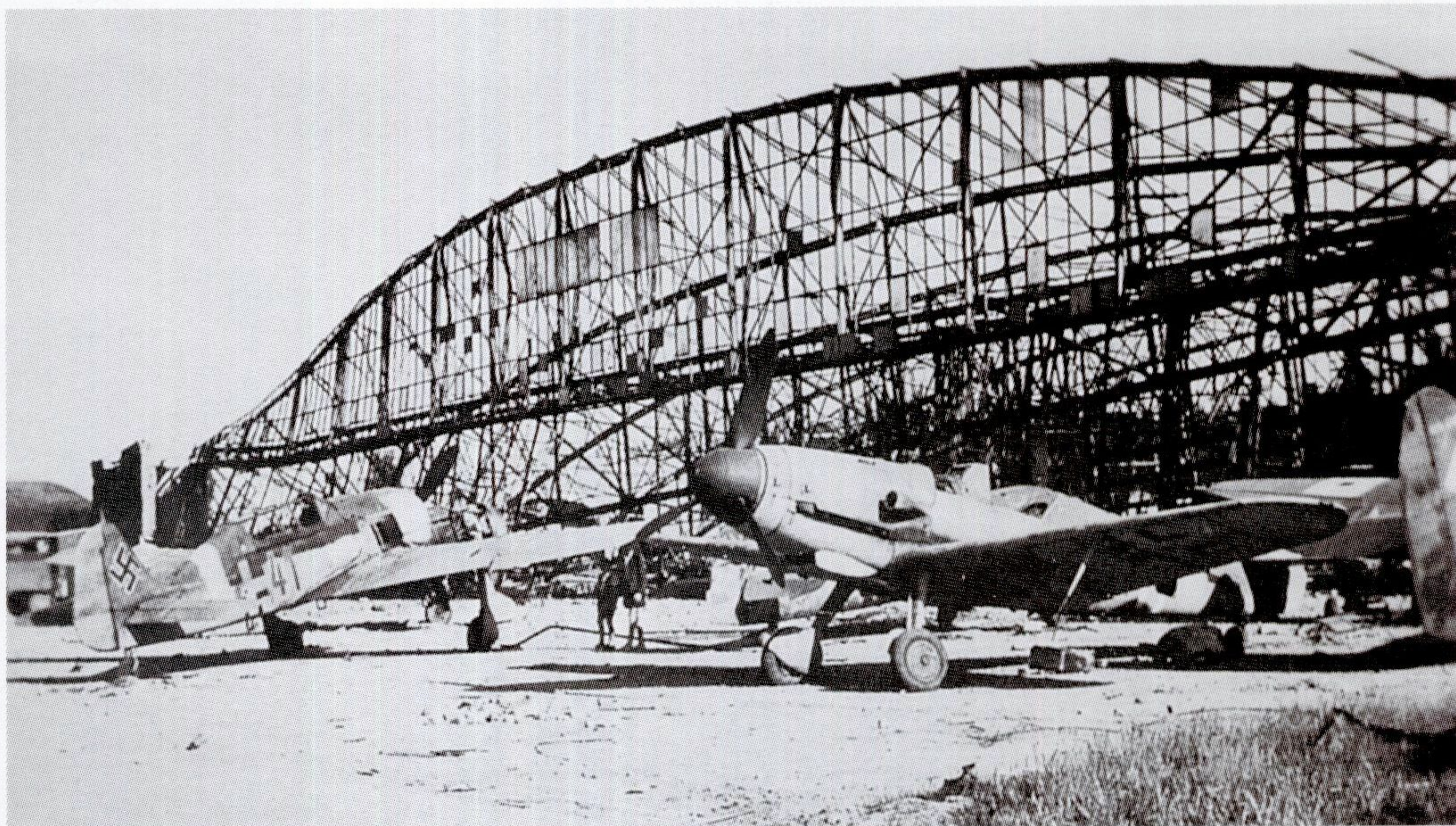
THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE TOP: 'Black 29', a Bf 109 G-6 of an unknown unit, was found at Pilsen by American troops in May 1945. The dark base colours on the fuselage sides were probably a combination of RLM 75 and 83 and the aircraft has a black horizontal II. Gruppe bar aft of the yellow fuselage band. Undersurfaces were almost certainly blue-grey RLM 76, but the most unusual feature of this machine is the mottled effect over the fuselage sides which are believed to be in another, straw-coloured variation of RLM 76. The same aircraft is shown again in the foreground (LEFT). Note how the dark fuselage colours extend well down the sides and that the underside of the engine cowling has also been mottled. All the other Bf 109s in this photograph have similar black tactical codes which suggests they may have belonged to the same unknown unit. The machine behind 'Black 29' is a Bf 109 G-12 two-seat trainer with the tactical code 'Black 1' and the third aircraft is a G-6 or G-14 marked 'Black 16'. The machine facing away from the camera in the middle distance, just to the right and above the nose of the Bf 109 G-12 'Black 1', is a two-seat Fw 190 S-8, probably of 1.Erg. KG(J), which has the tactical number 'Blue 41' ahead of the fuselage cross.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-6 'Black 29', unknown unit, Pilsen, May 1945

The basic camouflage on the uppersurfaces of this machine was 75 and 83, over which spots of a straw-coloured variation of 76 have been applied to the fuselage sides. The undersurfaces of the fuselage, wings and tailplane are finished in the usual blue-grey 76 but the white outlines forming the fuselage Balkenkreuz are marginally thicker than normal. No wire antenna running from the top of the tail to the fuselage may be seen in the accompanying photographs, and although it is possible this had been damaged, the aircraft has been depicted accordingly in the profile.



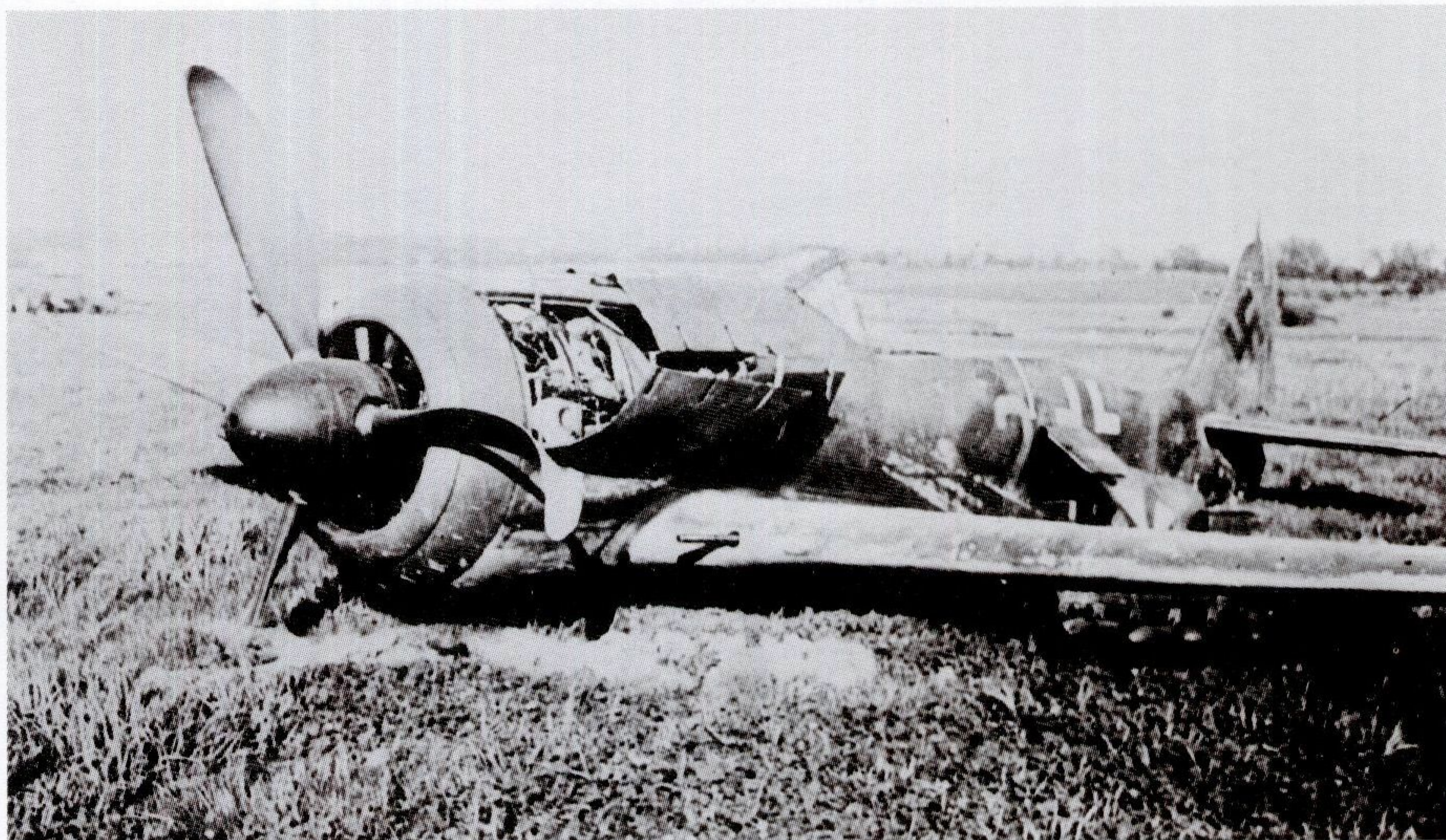
RIGHT: Another view of the two-seat Fw 190 S-8 shown in the background of the photograph on the opposite page and which is thought to have belonged to I./Ergänzungskampfgeschwader (J). From about September 1944, most of the surviving bomber units had either been inactive or were being disbanded and on 23 November, after intense negotiations between Adolf Galland, the General der Jagdflieger, and the General der Kampfflieger, the bomber units KG 6, KG 27, KG 30 and KG 55 were ordered to convert to fighter operations. Under this arrangement, the bomber units retained their KG designations but with the suffix (J) for Jagd to reflect their new role. In November, Ergänzungskampfgruppe (J) was formed from IV./KG 27 at Pilsen to assist bomber pilots convert to fighters before joining one of the operational KG(J)s. In January 1945, the Gruppe was expanded to an Ergänzungskampfgeschwader (J) with two Gruppen, and although the unit was redesignated EJG 2 in February and moved to Ansbach, the 4. Staffel of I. Gruppe remained at Pilsen until the end of the war.



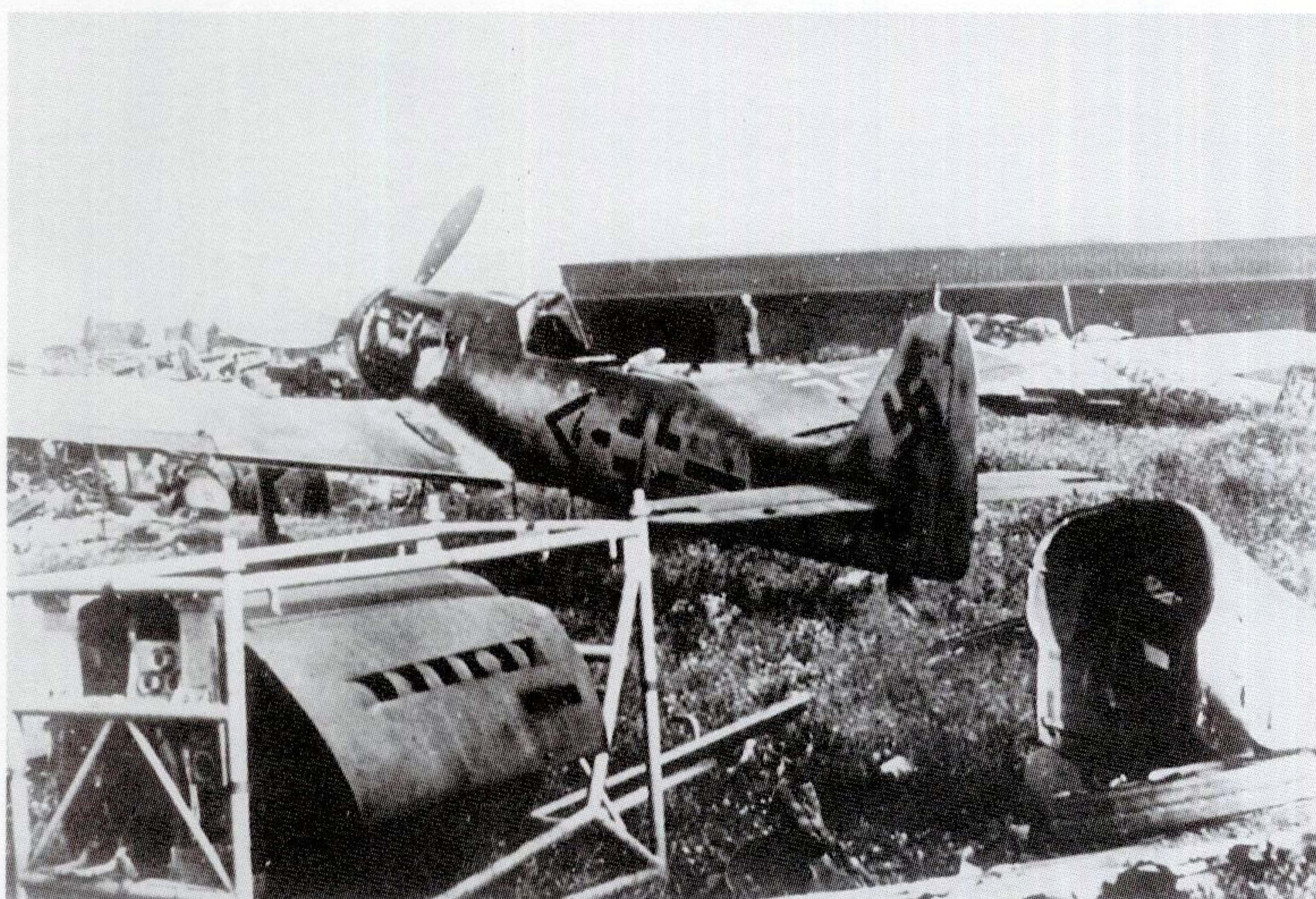
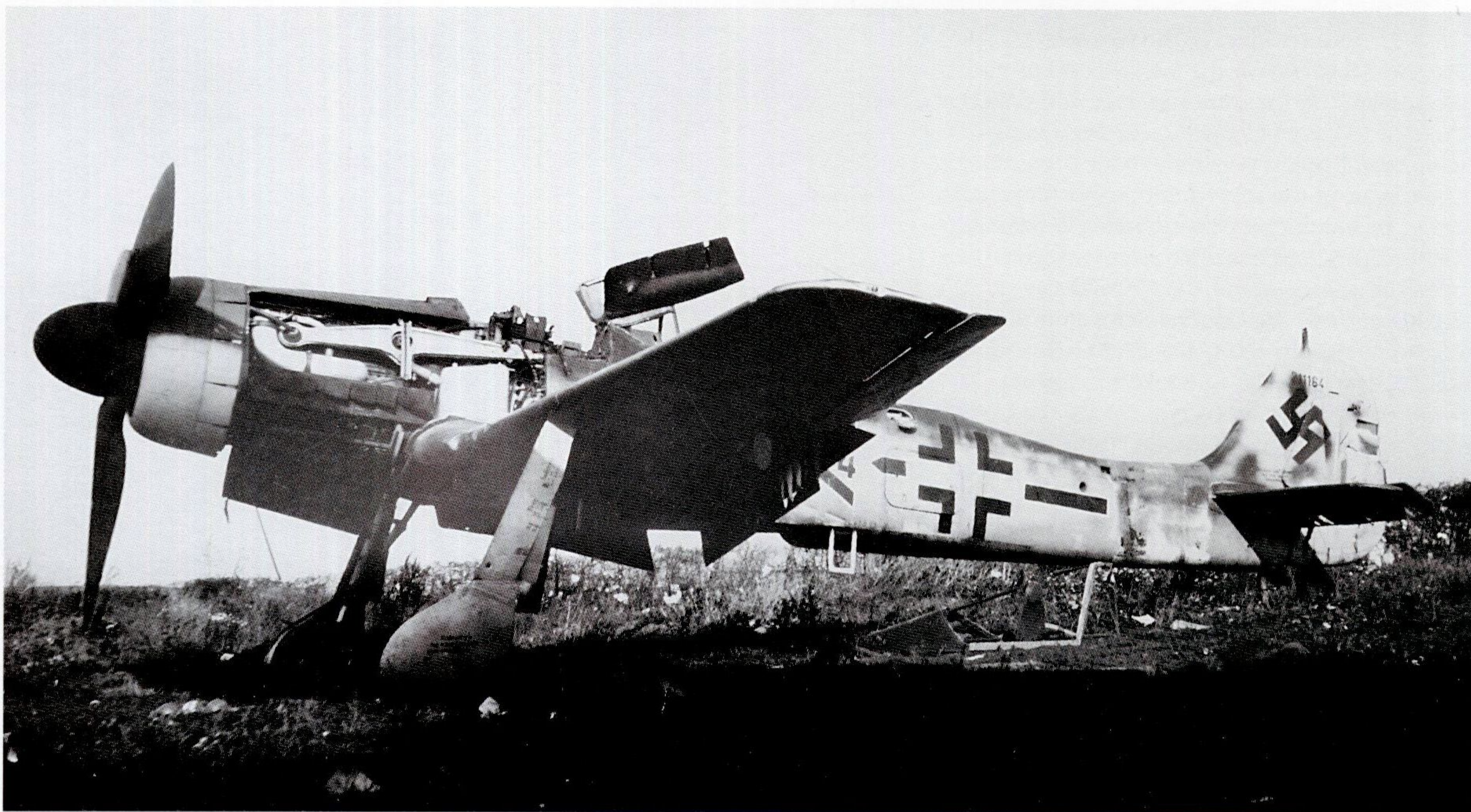
Focke-Wulf Fw 190 S-8 'Blue 41' of I. Erg. KG(J), Pilsen, May 1945

The colours on this machine were mainly RLM 74, 75 and 76 but the addition of 83 is evident, particularly around the cockpit and canopy area, and is presumably a result of the conversion to a two-seat configuration.

RIGHT: This machine was seen at Chrudim in Czechoslovakia at the end of the war and the photograph is one of only a few showing an aircraft equipped with Panzerblitz 1 anti-tank rockets. Bombs generally had little effect on tanks and for some time the Luftwaffe preferred heavy cannon for anti-tank work. However, a combination of thicker armour plating on armoured fighting vehicles and a shortage of tungsten required for anti-tank ammunition resulted in the development of anti-tank rockets which had a hollow-charge warhead. As the Panzerfaust infantry weapon had already been used with some success by German ground forces, it was a logical development to mount them on aircraft so that armoured vehicles could be attacked from the air. Thereafter, considerable progress was made in equipping units with anti-tank rockets and by 20 April 1945, 13 Staffeln were equipped with rocket-firing Fw 190 F-8s, the majority employing Panzerblitz while only two or three Staffeln flew the Panzerschreck Fw 190 F-8. This 'Yellow 2' is believed to have belonged to 9./SG 77, and the only other Staffel of this Schlachtgeschwader to employ rockets was 5./SG 77 which, however, used the Panzerschreck.



THIS PAGE: This Fw 190 D-9, W.Nr. 211164, was found abandoned on the airfield at Prague-Ruzyne in Czechoslovakia in May 1945. The unit to which this machine belonged is not known but as the markings are those of a Geschwader Stab and as there were only two such formations equipped with the D-9 in Czechoslovakia in 1945, the possibilities can be narrowed to Stab/JG 2 or Stab/JG 6. Note that the port undercarriage fairing was one colour but has been caught in the shadow of a building.



Focke-Wulf Fw 190 D-9 at Prague-Ruzyne, Czechoslovakia, May 1945

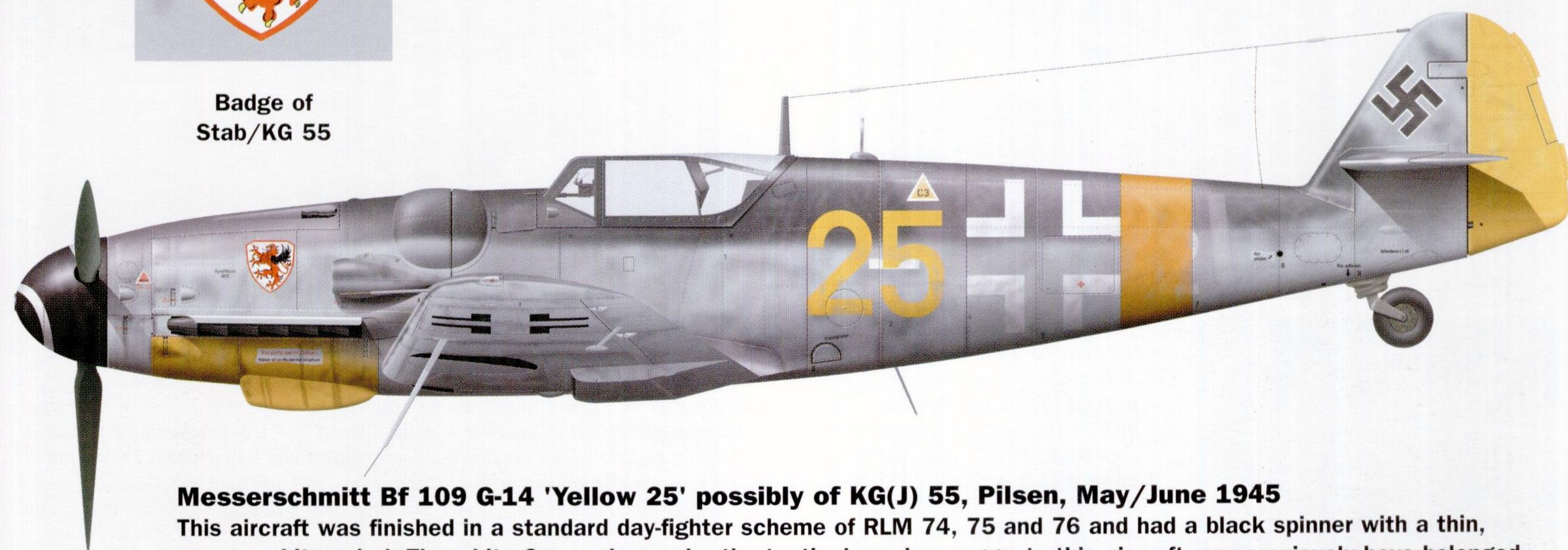
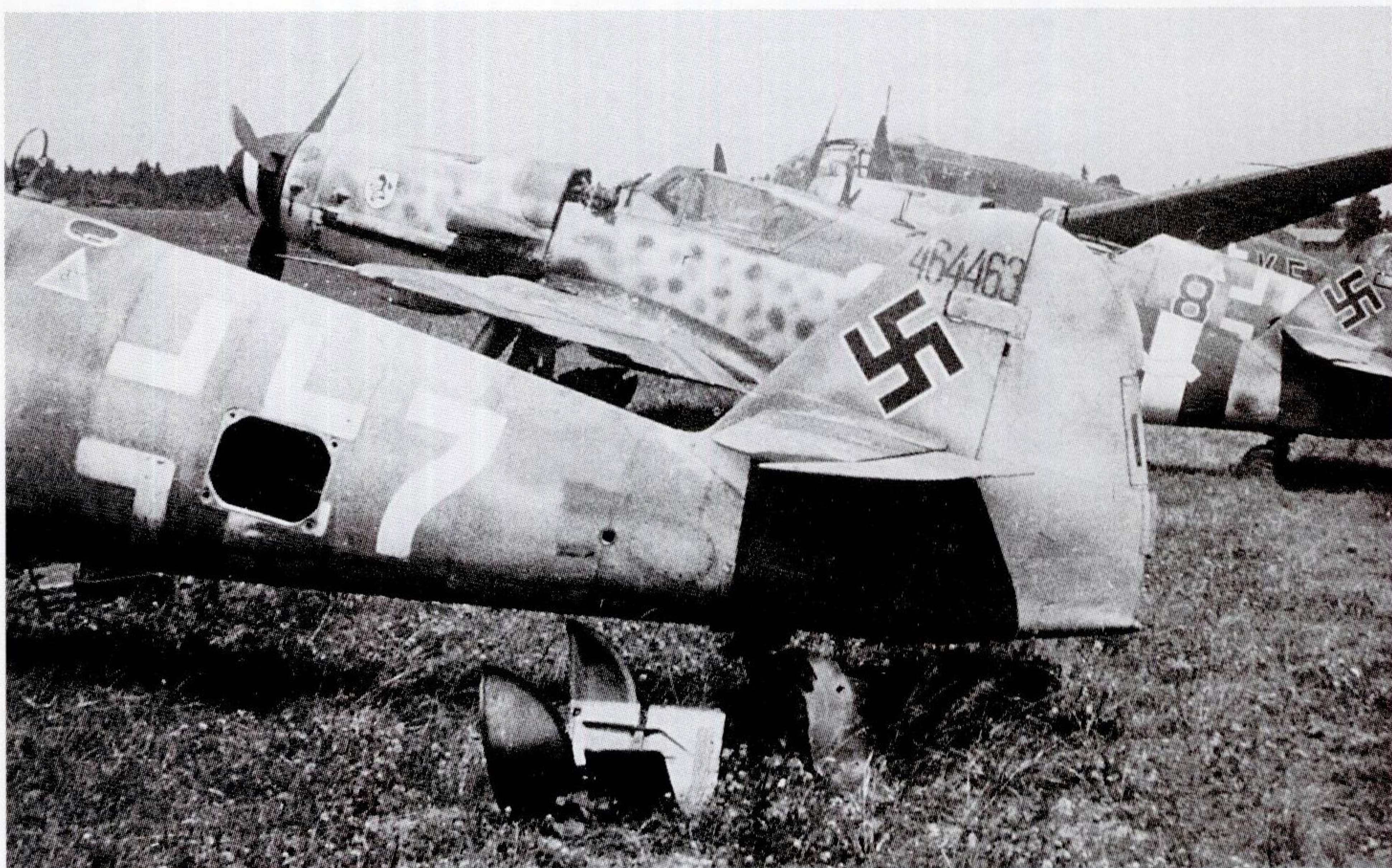
In a fairly typical scheme for Fw 190 D-9s, the fuselage on this aircraft was finished mainly in 83 with a small area of 75 on the spine which had been mottled with 83, this mottling extending to include part of the rear fuselage band. Uppersurfaces of the wings and tailplane were in 75 and 83, undersurfaces were in blue-grey 76 and the mottles on the tail were in RLM 81.



RIGHT: A group of aircraft abandoned in Czechoslovakia in 1945. The two aircraft nearest the camera are both Bf 109 G-14s and the machine in the foreground, W.Nr. 464463, is unusual in having a tactical number behind the fuselage Balkenkreuz. It may therefore have been assigned to the ROA. Note also the panel lying on the ground which has been removed from immediately ahead of the windscreen when the aircraft was disarmed, part of the blisters which covered the breeches of the MG 131s being clearly visible. Behind 'White 7' is 'White 1' of 4./JG 4 with that Staffel's knight's helmet badge on the nose and black/white/black Defence of the Reich bands on the rear fuselage, upon which is superimposed the white wavy line of IV. Gruppe.



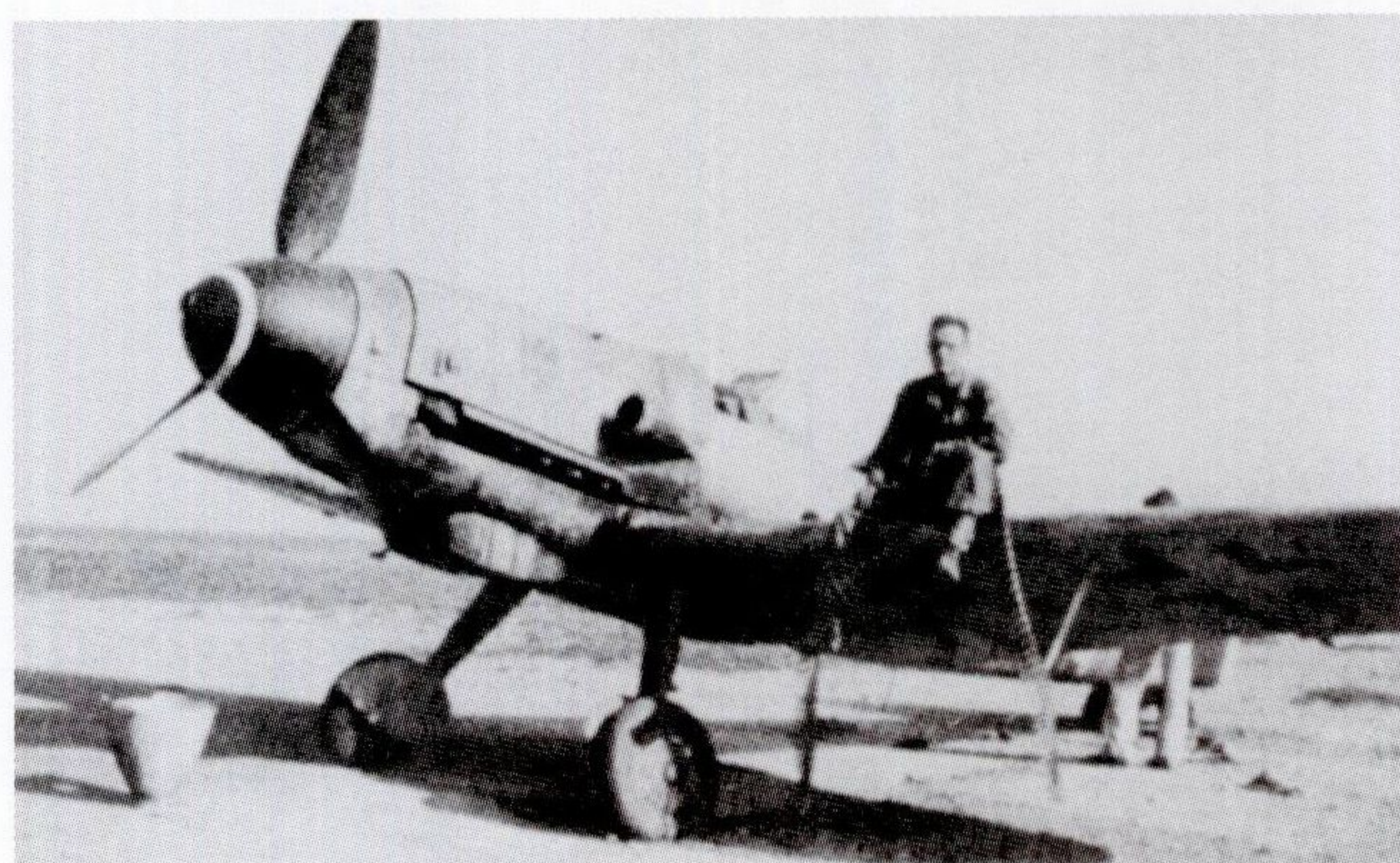
**Badge of
Stab/KG 55**

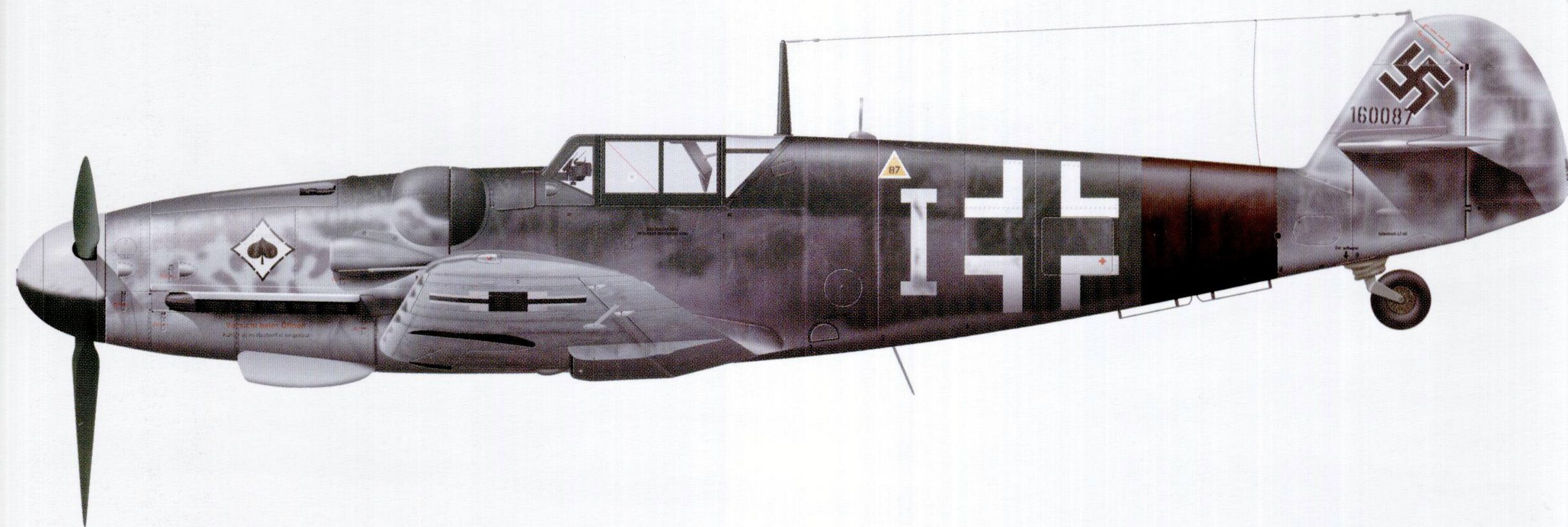


Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-14 'Yellow 25' possibly of KG(J) 55, Pilsen, May/June 1945

This aircraft was finished in a standard day-fighter scheme of RLM 74, 75 and 76 and had a black spinner with a thin, uneven white spiral. The white Gruppe bar under the tactical number suggests this aircraft may previously have belonged to II./JG 51 before being assigned to a later unit which, from the red griffin badge on the nose, is thought to have been KG(J) 55. Note that the Balkenkreuz under the wings consisted only of a black outline.

LEFT AND BELOW: This Bf 109 G-14, W.Nr 46459?, was discovered by US troops at Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, in May or June 1945. Ahead of the fuselage Balkenkreuz the aircraft carried the tactical number 'Yellow 25' which had been painted directly over a white horizontal II. Gruppe bar identical to that used by II./JG 51. On the engine cowling, however, was a badge almost identical to that used by Stab/KG 55, and it is thought that the machine may have flown with II./JG 51 before being passed to KG(J) 55, a former bomber unit which, as the modified Geschwader designation indicates, consisted of bomber pilots flying in the fighter role.





Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-6 of I./JG 53, Braunschardt, Summer 1945

Although built as a G-6, it is thought this machine may later have been modified to a G-14, at which time parts of the airframe were probably repainted for, although the fin and rudder show traces of a weathered 74/75/76 scheme, the contrast between the camouflage colours and the centre of the fuselage Balkenkreuz indicate areas which have been repainted with RLM 74. A wide black band was painted around the rear fuselage and the tactical number has been applied as a Roman numeral.





ABOVE: A Bf 109 G-10/R2 at Liberec (Reichenberg) in Czechoslovakia, probably camouflaged in an 83/75/76 scheme with the rudder in 81 with hard-edged patches of 83. This aircraft was a reconnaissance version of the G-10 and belonged to Nahaufklärungsgruppe 15 which, with a Stab, 1. and 2. Staffel, moved to Liberec on 18 April 1945 and remained there until the end of the war. All aircraft of NAG 15 had black numbers outlined in white, this example being 'Black 9'. As the rudder is turned, not all digits of the Werknummer are visible, but the complete number is thought to be W.Nr. 770376 (or 770375). Behind this aircraft is another G-10, possibly of Stab/NAG 15, which has a chevron as well as a number as a tactical code on the fuselage. These aircraft were photographed in the winter of 1945/46.



LEFT: A machine found at Gatow in May 1945 was this Bf 109 G-12 two-seat trainer, apparently still finished in a winter scheme. No tactical number can be seen on the fuselage.

BELOW: This Bf 109 G-10 'Black 3', W.Nr. 770313, was also photographed at Gatow in Berlin in 1945. The machine was probably camouflaged largely in a 75/83/76 scheme and had a dark colour on the oil tank cover forward of the main engine cowling. Such mismatching of components was not at all uncommon in the last months of the war as the aircraft industry had been dispersed to avoid Allied bombing and parts were manufactured by a wide range of sub-contractors. The spinner was black with a white spiral but the propeller blades were green 70. Towards the end of the war, RLM 70 had been withdrawn as a camouflage colour and was only used for painting metal propeller blades and, usually, spinners. Note the wavy demarcation line along the leading edges of the wings and that Soviet troops have written a message on the fuselage.

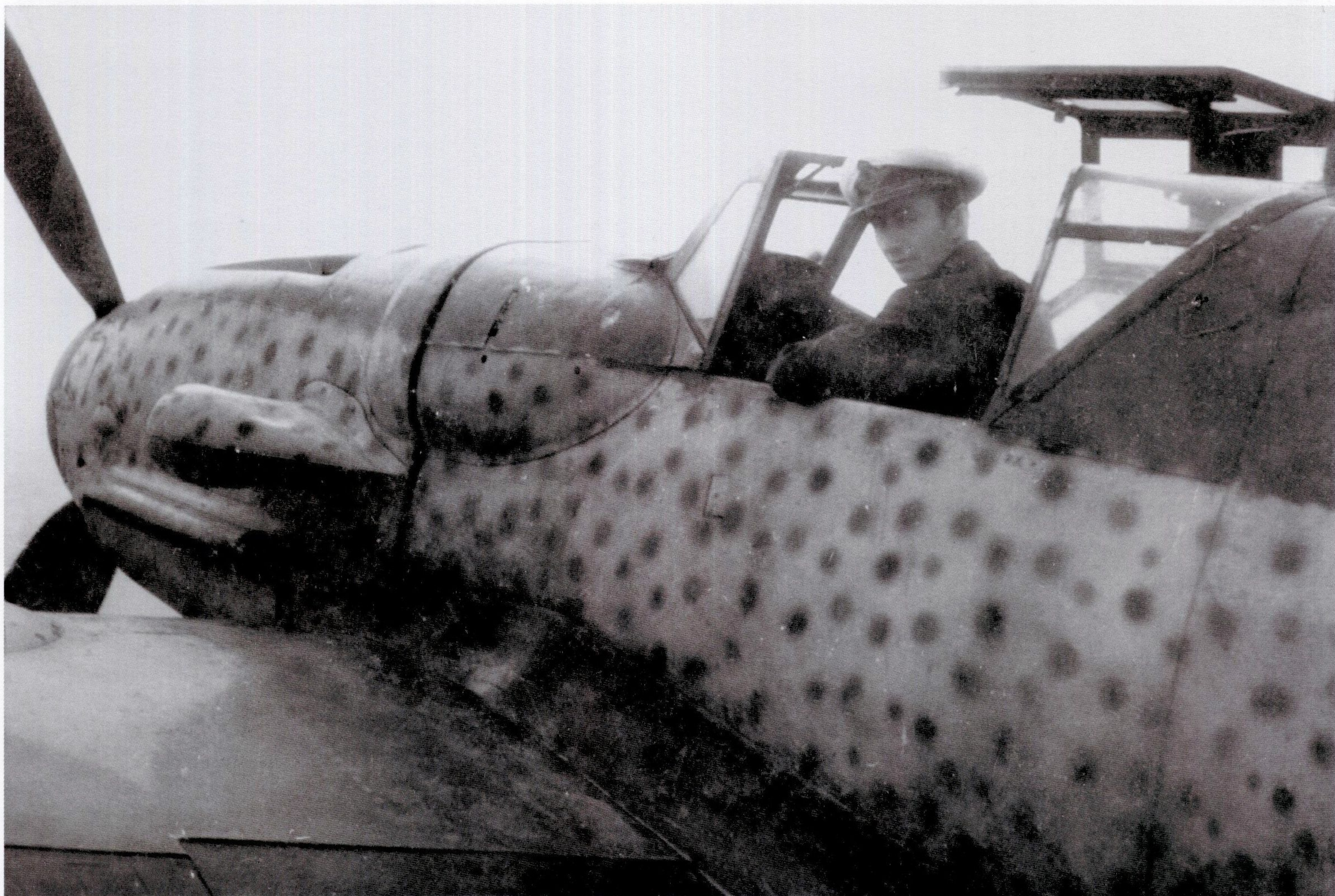




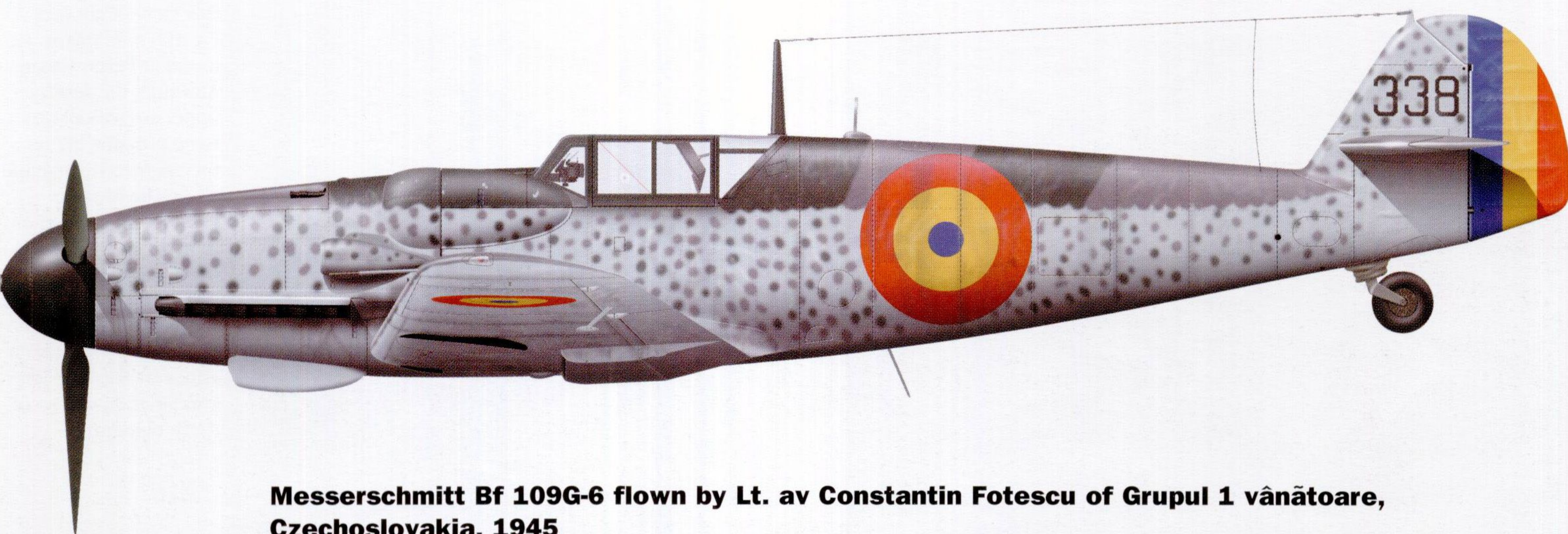
ABOVE: 'White 11' was found abandoned at Berlin-Gatow at the end of the war but was photographed in early 1946. The Werknummer 170638 confirms that this is an Fw 190 A-8 manufactured in October or November 1944 and was probably finished in 81 and 82 on the uppersurfaces with 76 on the fuselage sides and undersurfaces. Both uppersurface colours have weathered and faded so that the new 81 or 83 sprayed over the repairs on the horizontal tail unit and the starboard outer wing show as dark patches against the original colours. Note also that where the tactical number has been moved from behind the fuselage Balkenkreuz, the patch of 76 is possibly the grey-green shade.



LEFT: The contrast between the grey-green 76 on the lower half of the engine cowlings and the standard blue-grey 76 on the fuselage is shown to advantage in this view of another Fw 190 A-8, 'Yellow 10' found at Berlin Gatow. Although the fuselage uppersurface colours were probably 82 on the engine cowlings and 81 on the blister cowlings over the guns, there is no sign of any demarcation lines on the uppersurface of the wings which may have been one overall green, either 81, 82 or 83, or a combination of two of these colours.

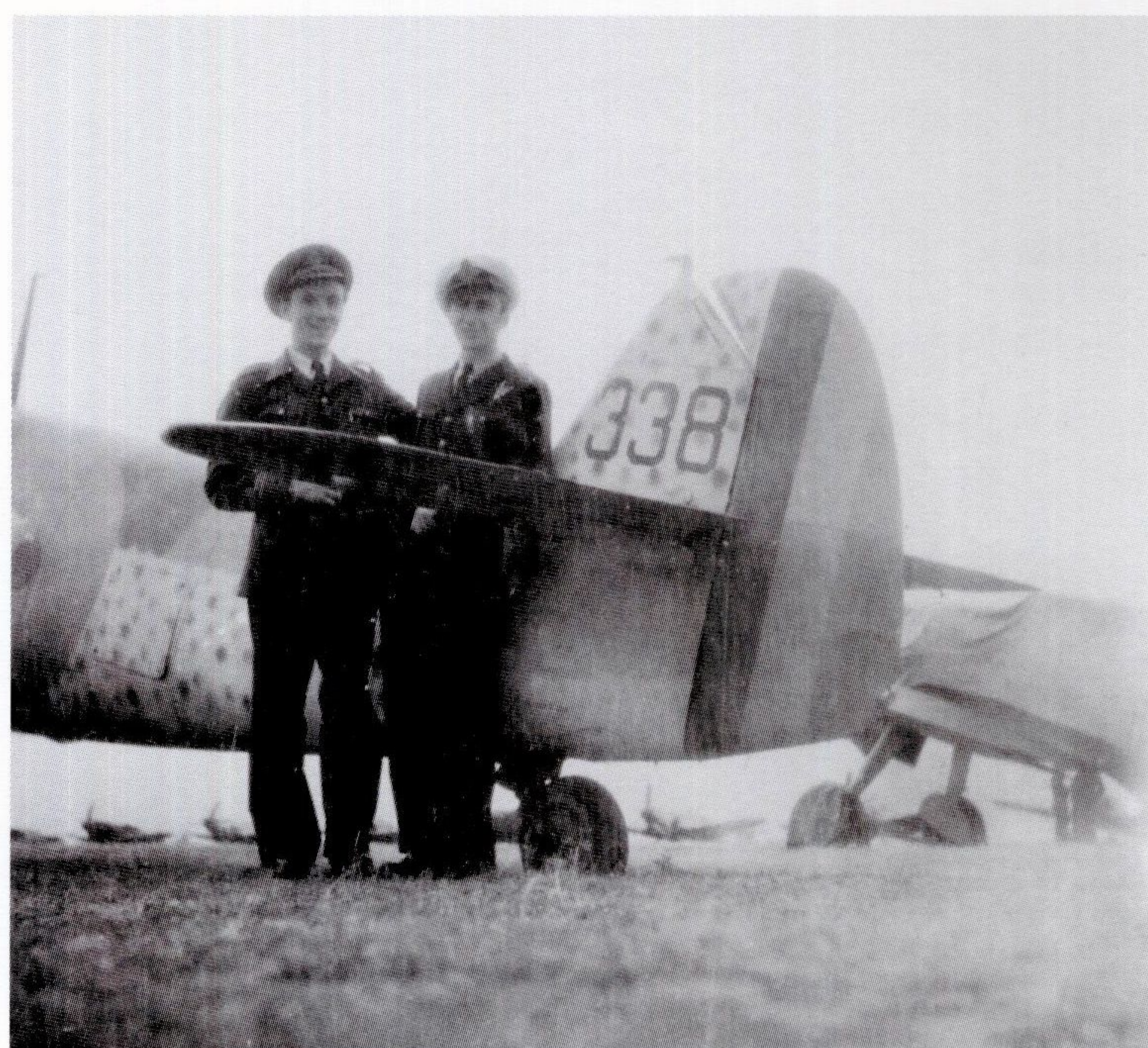


THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE TOP: The Industria Aeronautica Romana (IAR) at Brasov in Rumania licence-built a number of Bf 109 G-6s which started arriving at the front with Grupul 1 vânătoare in March 1945. A particular feature of these machines was the type of streamlined blister over the engine-mounted machine guns, as shown (*ABOVE*). This particular machine, 'Black 338', was flown by Lt. av Constantin Fotescu and although pictured here after the war, may well have been used in action against German forces in Czechoslovakia in the closing days of the conflict.



Messerschmitt Bf 109G-6 flown by Lt. av Constantin Fotescu of Grupul 1 vânătoare, Czechoslovakia, 1945

Although this aircraft was built at least six months after Rumania changed sides, it was nevertheless finished in a Rumanian interpretation of the standard 74/75/76 Luftwaffe camouflage scheme but with exceptionally small fuselage mottles. In place of the Michael's cross used when Rumania was an ally of Hitler's Germany, the aircraft had roundels as the new national marking and carried the number '338' painted in black on the tail unit.



BELOW: Although Jagdgeschwader 5, known as the 'Eismeergeschwader', was not stationed on the Eastern Front when these photographs were taken in early 1945, they have been included as the unit had previously seen action in the East where many of its pilots had gained valuable experience. JG 5 was subjected to a considerable number of organisational changes during its history, with Staffeln being frequently redesignated. These photographs were taken at Herdla, in Norway, in early 1945 and the scene shows aircraft of 12. Staffel. The machine nearest the camera is 'Blue 8', an Fw 190 A-8 which was flown by Uffz. Dietrich and has the Geschwader's badge on the engine cowling and, not visible here, the name 'Erika' under the cockpit in white.



January 1944-May 1945



ABOVE AND BELOW: General views of Herdla airfield showing a starter trolley connected to one of JG 5's Fw 190s.





ABOVE AND RIGHT:
This Fw 190 A-8, is
'White 3' of 9./JG 52.
The aircraft was flown
by Uffz. Gerhard
Eisermann and
'Ingeborg', painted on
the fuselage, was the
name of his wife. The
aircraft lacks a
Geschwader badge but
note the circular
marking of IV. Gruppe
aft of the Balkenkreuz
and that the fuselage
has been repainted to
tone down the bright
areas of the original
74/75/76 finish, traces
of which may still be
seen around the
swastika.





ABOVE: Another aircraft carrying a personal name of significance to the pilot was this Fw 190 A-8 named 'Waltraut' and flown by Uffz. Hans Steiner.

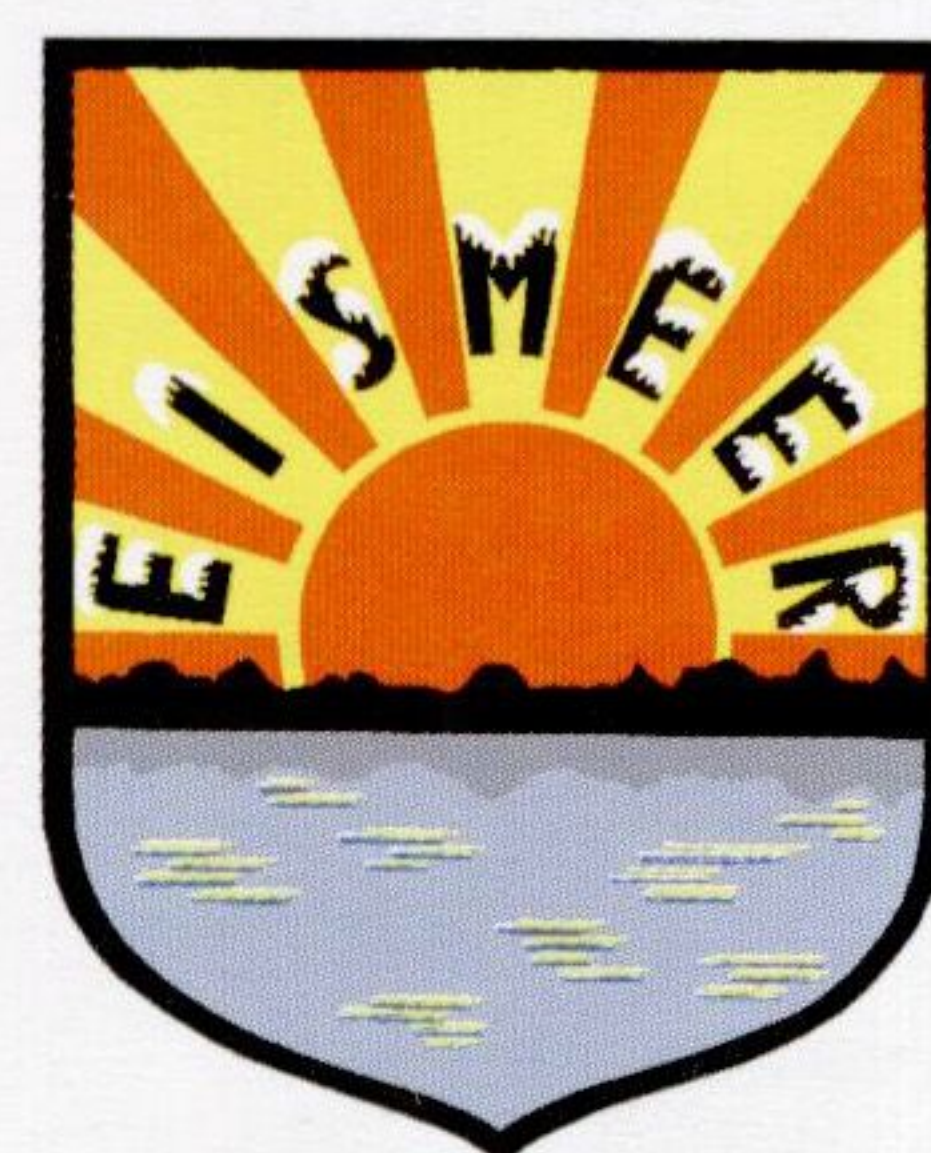


BELOW AND BELOW LEFT: In one of the last changes in February or March 1945, 9./JG 5 was redesignated 5./JG 5 and a new 9. Staffel was formed from 13./JG 5. 'White 9', named 'Netty', belonged to this Staffel and was flown by Uffz. Eisermann, shown (BELOW) with his chief mechanic. The Staffel's coastal defence sorties often involved flying over the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea – one of the most inhospitable expanses of water in the world – to intercept RAF Mosquitoes which frequently flew anti-shipping strikes escorted by Mustangs. Hence the pilot's inflatable life jacket and the cartridges for his flare pistol below his left knee.



Focke-Wulf Fw 190 A-8 flown by Uffz. Martin Ullmann of 9./JG 5, Herdla, Norway, March 1945

Although finished in standard colours RLM 74, 75 and 76, the fuselage on this machine has been darkened with a dense mottle pattern which extends well down the sides although traces of the original, lighter camouflage may still be seen around the Hakenkreuz. Some Fw 190s of JG 5 are known to have had the armoured ring around the nose painted in the Staffel colour, in this case white, and although this feature cannot be seen in any of the available photographs of 'White 9', it has been shown in the profile. The small Gruppe disc aft of the fuselage Balkenkreuz originated when the Staffel was 13./JG 5 and formed part of IV./JG 5 before being redesignated 9./JG 5. The upper surface of the wings and tailplane are finished in 74 and 75 and all undersurfaces were standard blue-grey RLM 76.



Emblem of 9./JG 5

